

## THE BLACK EAGLE MYSTERY

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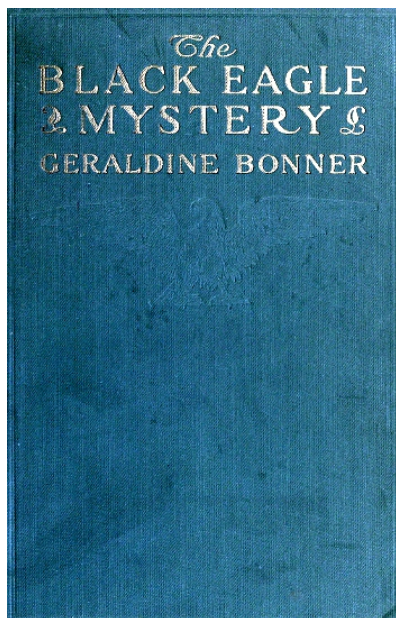
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THE BLACK EAGLE MYSTERY  
BY GERALDINE BONNER

Author of "The Girl at Central"

ILLUSTRATED BY  
FREDERIC DORR STEELE

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
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*Mr. Harland's body had been found  
on the sidewalk.*



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CHAPTER XXI

# FOREWORD

The following story of what has been known as "The Black Eagle Mystery" has been compiled from documents contributed by two persons thoroughly conversant with the subject. These are Molly Morgenthau Babbitts and John Reddy, whose position of inside observers and active participants makes it possible for them to give to the public a consecutive and detailed narrative of this most unusual case.





# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Mr. Harland's body had been found on the sidewalk.

'Say,' he said, 'you're a live one, aren't you?'

It was locked or I would have gone in.

'When did they discover it?' she said in a low voice.



# CHAPTER I

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

"Hello!" said Babbitts from the sheets of the morning paper.

I'll call him Babbitts to you because that's the name you'll remember him by—that is if you know about the Hesketh Mystery. I generally call him "Soapy," the name the reporters gave him, and "Himself," which comes natural to me, my mother being Irish. Maybe you'll remember that too? And he calls me "Morningdew"—cute, isn't it? It's American for my last name Morgenthau—I was Molly Morgenthau before I was married.

In case you *don't* know about the Hesketh Mystery I'll have to give a few facts to locate us. I was the telephone girl in Longwood, New Jersey, met Babbitts there when he was a reporter for the *Dispatch*—he is yet—and the switchboard lost one of its brightest ornaments. It was town for us, an apartment on West Ninety-fifth Street, near the Subway, five rooms on a corner, furnished like a Belasco play. If you read the Hesketh Mystery you know how I came by that furniture, and if you didn't you'll have to stay in ignorance, for I'm too anxious to get on to stop and tell you. Every day at ten Isabella Dabney, a light-colored coon, comes in to do the heavy work and I order her round, throwing a bluff that I'm used to it and hoping Isabella isn't on.

We've been married over two years and we're still—Oh, what's the use! But we *do* get on like a house on fire. I guess in this vast metropolis there's not a woman got anything on me when it comes to happiness. It certainly *is* wonderful how you bloom out and the mean part of you fades away when someone thinks you're the perfect article, handsewn, silk-lined, made in America.

And so having taken this little run round the lot, I'll come back to Babbitts with his head in the morning paper saying "Hello!"

It was a clear, crisp morning in January—sixteenth of the month—and we were at breakfast. Himself had just got in from Cleveland, where he'd been sent to write up the Cheney graft prosecution. It took some minutes to say "How d'ye do"—he'd been away two whole days—and after we'd concluded the ceremonies I lit into the kitchen to get his breakfast while he sat down at his end of the table and dived into the papers. His egg was before him and I was setting the coffeepot down at my end when he gave that "Hello," loud and startled, with the accent on the "lo."

"What's up now?" said I, looking over the layout before me to see if I'd forgotten anything.

"Hollings Harland's committed suicide," came out of the paper.

"Lord, has he!" said I. "Isn't that awful?" I took up the cream pitcher. "Well, what do you make of that—the cream's frozen."

"Last night at half-past six. Threw himself out of his office window on the eighteenth story."

"Eighteenth story!—that's some fall. I've got to take this cream out with a spoon." I spooned up some, all white spikes and edges, wondering if it would chill his coffee which he likes piping hot. "Darling, do you mind waiting a little while I warm up the cream?"

"Darn the cream! What rotten luck that I was away. I suppose they put Eddie Saunders on it, sounds like his flat-footed style. Listen to this: 'The body struck the pavement with a violent impact.' That's the way he describes the fall of a man from the top of a skyscraper. Gee, why wasn't I here?"

"But, dearie," I said, passing him his cup, "Saunders would have done it if you *had* been here. You don't do suicides."

"I do this one. Hollings Harland, one of the big corporation lawyers of New York."

"Oh," I said, "he's an important person."

"Rather. A top liner in his profession."

"Why did he commit suicide?"

"Caught in the Copper Pool, they think here."

With the cup at his lips he went on reading over its edge.

"Does it taste all right?" I asked and he grunted something that would have been "A 1" if it hadn't dropped into the coffee and been drowned.

My mind at rest about him I could give it to the morning sensation.

"What's the Copper Pool?" I asked.

"A badly named weapon to jack up prices and gouge the public, young woman. Just like a corner in hats. Suppose you could buy up all the spring hats,

you could pretty near name your own figure on them, couldn't you?"

"They do that now without a corner," I said sadly.

"Well, they can't in copper. The Pool means that a bunch of financiers have put up millions to corner the copper market and skyrocket the price."

"Oh, he lost all his money in it and got desperate and jumped out."

"Um—from the hall window in the Black Eagle Building."

That made it come nearer, the way things do when someone you know is on the ground.

"Why that's where Iola Barry works—in Miss Whitehall's office on the seventeenth floor."

Babbitts' eyes shifted from the paper to his loving spouse:

"That's so. I'd forgotten it. Just one story below. I wonder if Iola was there."

"I guess not, she goes home at six. It's a good thing she wasn't. She's a hysterical, timid little rat. Being round when a thing like that happened would have broke her up more than a spell of sickness."

Iola Barry was a chum of mine. Four years ago, before I was transferred to New Jersey, we'd been girls together in the same exchange, and though I didn't see much of her when I was Central in Longwood, since I'd come back we'd met up and renewed the old friendship. Having the fatality happen so close to her fanned my interest considerable and I reached across and picked up one of the papers.

The first thing my eye lit on was a picture of Hollings Harland—a fine looking, smooth-shaven man.

When I saw the two long columns about him I realized what an important person he was and why Babbitts was so mad he'd missed the detail. Besides his own picture there was one of his house—an elegant residence on Riverside Drive, full of pictures and statuary, and a library he'd taken years to collect. Then there was all about him and his life. He was forty-six years of age and though small in stature, a fine physical specimen, never showing, no matter how hard he worked, a sign of nerves or weariness. In his boyhood he'd come from a town up state, and risen from the bottom to the top, "cleaving his way up," the paper had it, "by his brilliant mind, indomitable will and tireless energy." Three years before, his wife had died and since then he'd retired from society, devoting himself entirely to business.

Toward the end of the article came a lot of stuff about the Copper Pool, and the names of the other men in it—he seemed to be in it too. There was only one of these I'd ever heard of—Johnston Barker—which didn't prove that I knew much, as everybody had heard of him. He was one of the big figures of finance, millionaire, magnate, plutocrat, the kind that one paper calls, "A malefactor of

great wealth," and its rival, "One of our most distinguished and public-spirited citizens." That places him better than a font of type. He was in the Copper Pool up to his neck—the head of it as far as I could make out.

I had just got through with that part—it wasn't interesting—and was reading what had happened before the suicide when Babbitts spoke:

"Harland seems to have had a scene in his office with Johnston Barker in the afternoon."

I looked up from my sheet and said:

"I've just been reading about it here. It tells how Barker came to see him and they had some kind of row."

"Read it," said Babbitts. "I want to get the whole thing before I go downtown." I read out:

"According to Della Franks and John Jerome, Harland's stenographer and head clerk, Johnston Barker called on Harland at half-past five that afternoon. The lawyer's offices are a suite of three rooms, one opening from the other. The last of these rooms was used as a private office and into this Harland conducted his visitor, closing the door. Miss Franks was in the middle room working at her typewriter, Mr. Jerome at his desk near-by. While so occupied they say they heard the men in the private office begin talking loudly. The sound of the typewriter drowned the words but both Miss Franks and Mr. Jerome agree that the voices were those of people in angry dispute. Presently they dropped and shortly after Mr. Harland came out. Miss Franks says the time was a few minutes after six, as she had just consulted a wrist watch she wore. Both clerks admitting that they were curious, looked at Mr. Harland and agree in describing him as pale, though otherwise giving no sign of anger or disturbance. He stopped at Jerome's desk and said quietly: 'I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't go till I come,' and left the office.

"Miss Franks and Mr. Jerome remained where they were. Miss Franks completed her work and then, having a dinner engagement with Mr. Jerome, sat on, waiting for Mr. Harland's return. In this way a half hour passed, the two clerks chatting together, impatient to be off. It was a quarter to seven and both were wondering what was delaying their employer when the desk telephone rang. Jerome answered it and heard from the janitor on the street level that Mr. Harland's body had been found on the sidewalk crushed to a shapeless mass. On hearing this, Miss Franks, uttering piercing cries, rose

and rushed into the hall followed by Jerome. They rang frantically for the elevator which didn't come. There are only two cars in the building, and that afternoon the express had broken and was not running. Getting no answer to his summons Jerome dashed to the hall window and throwing it up looked down on to the street, which even from that height, he could see was black with people. Miss Franks, who when interviewed was still hysterical, stood by the elevators pressing the buttons. In their excitement both of them forgot Mr. Barker who when they left was still in the back office."

"Um," said Babbitts. "Is that all about Barker?"

I looked down the column.

"No—there's some more in another place. Here: 'Johnston Barker, whose interview with Harland is supposed to have driven the desperate lawyer to suicide, was not found in his house last night. Repeated telephone calls throughout the evening only elicited the answer that Mr. Barker was not at home and it was not known where he was.' Then there's a lot about him and his connection with the Copper Pool. Do you want to hear it?"

"No, I know all that. Pretty grisly business. But I don't see why Barker's lying low. Why the devil doesn't he show up?"

"Perhaps he doesn't like the notoriety. Does it say in your paper too that they couldn't find him?"

"About the same. Looks to me as if there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere."

"Maybe he never expected the man would kill himself and he's prostrated with horror at what he's responsible for."

Babbitts threw down his paper with a sarcastic grin:

"I guess it takes more than that to prostrate Johnston Barker. You don't rise from nothing to be one of the plutocrats of America and keep your conscience in cotton wool."

I turned the page of my paper and there, staring at me, was a picture of the man we were talking about.

"Here he is," I said, "on the inside page," and then read: "Johnston Barker, whose interview with Hollings Harland is thought to have precipitated the suicide and who was not to be found last evening at his home or club."

Babbitts came round and looked over my shoulder:

"Did you ever see a harder, more forceful mug? Look at the nose—like a beak. Men with noses like that always seem to me like birds of prey."

The picture did have that look. The face was thin, one of those narrow, lean ones with a few deep lines like folds in the skin. The nose was, as Babbitts said, a regular beak, like a curved scimitar, big and hooked. A sort of military-looking, white moustache hid the mouth, and the eyes behind glasses were keen and dark. I guess you'd have called it quite a handsome face, if it hadn't been for the grim, hard expression—like it belonged to some sort of fighter who wouldn't give you any mercy if you stood in his way.

"It takes a feller like that to make millions in these trust-busting days," said Babbitts.

"He looks as if he could corner copper and anything else that took his fancy," I answered.

"If he's really flown the coop there'll be the devil to pay in Wall Street." He gave my shoulder a pat. "Well, we'll see today and the sooner I get on the scene of action the sooner I'll know. Good-by, my Morningdew.—Kiss me and speed me on my perilous way."

After he'd gone I tidied up the place, had the morning powwow with Isabella, and then drifted into the parlor. The sun was slanting bright through the windows and as I stood looking out at the thin covering of ice, glittering here and there on the roofs—there'd been rain before the frost—I got the idea I ought to go down and see Iola. She was a frail, high-strung little body and what had happened last night in the Black Eagle Building would put a crimp in her nerves for days to come, especially as just now she had worries of her own. Clara, her sister with whom she lived, had gone into the hair business—not selling it, brushing it on ladies' heads—and hadn't done well, so Iola was the main support of the two of them. Three years ago she'd left the telephone company to better herself, studying typing and stenography, and at first she'd had a hard time, getting into offices where the men were so fierce they scared her so she couldn't work, or so affectionate they scared her so she resigned her job. Then at last she landed a good place at Miss Whitehall's—Carol Whitehall, who had a real-estate scheme—villas and cottages out in New Jersey.

Now while you think of me in my blue serge suit and squirrel furs, with a red wing in my hat and a bunch of cherries pinned on my neckpiece, flashing under the city in the subway, I'll tell you about Carol Whitehall. She's important in this story—I guess you'd call her the heroine—for though the capital "I"s are thick in it, you've got to see that letter as nothing more than a hand holding a pen.

The first I heard of Miss Whitehall was nearly two years back from the Cressets, friends of mine who live on a farm out Longwood way where I was once



Central. She and her mother—a widow lady—came there from somewhere in the Middle West and bought the Azalea Woods Farm, a fine rich stretch of land, back in the hills behind Azalea village. They were going to run it themselves, having, the gossip said, independent means and liking the simple life. The neighbors, high and low, soon got acquainted with them and found them nice genteel ladies, the mother very quiet and dignified, but Miss Carol a live wire and as handsome as a picture.

They'd been in the place about a year when the railroad threw out a branch that crossed over the hills near their land. This increased its value immensely and folks were wondering if they'd sell out—they had several offers—when it was announced that they were going to start a villa site company to be called the Azalea Woods Estates. In the Autumn when I was down at the Cressets—Soapy and I go there for Sundays sometimes—the Cresset boys had been over in their new Ford car, and said what were once open fields were all laid out in roads with little spindly trees planted along the edges. There was a swell station, white with a corrugated red roof, and several houses up, some stucco like the station and others low and squatty in the bungalow style.

It was a big undertaking and there was a good deal of talk, no one supposing the Whitehalls had money enough to break out in such a roomy way, but when it came down to brass tacks, nobody had any real information about them. For all Longwood and Azalea knew they might have been cutting off coupons ever since they came.

As soon as the Azalea Woods Estates started they moved to town. Iola told me they had a nice little flat on the East Side and the offices were the swellest she'd ever been employed in. I'd never been in them, though I sometimes went to the Black Eagle Building and took Iola out to lunch. I didn't like to go up, having no business there, and used to telephone her in the morning and make the date, then hang round the entrance hall till she came down.

Besides Miss Whitehall and Iola there was a managing clerk, Anthony Ford. I'd never seen him no more than I had Miss Whitehall, but I'd heard a lot about him. After Iola'd told me what a good-looker he was and how he'd come swinging in in the morning, always jolly and full of compliments, I got a hunch that she was getting too interested in him. She said she wasn't—did you ever know a girl who didn't?—and when I asked her point blank, ruffled up like a wet hen and snapped out:

"Molly Babbitts, ain't I been in business long enough to know I got to keep my heart locked up in the office safe?"

And I couldn't help answering:

"Well, don't give away the combination till you're good and sure it's the right man that's asking for it."

# CHAPTER II

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

The Black Eagle Building is part-way downtown—not one of the skyscrapers that crowd together on the tip of the Island's tongue and not one of the advance guard squeezing in among the mansions of the rich, darkening their windows and spoiling their chimney draughts—poor, suffering dears!

As I came up the subway stairs I could see it bulking up above the roofs, a long narrow shape, with its windows shining in the sun. It stood on a corner presenting a great slab of wall to the side street and its front to Broadway. There were two entrances, the main one—with an eagle in a niche over the door—on Broadway, and a smaller one on the side street. There is only one other very high building near there—the Massasoit—facing on Fifth Avenue, its back soaring above the small houses that look like a line of children's toys.

My way was along the side street, chilled by the shadow of the building, and as I passed the small entrance I stopped and looked up. The wall rose like a rampart, story over story, the windows as similar and even as cells in a honeycomb. Way up, the cornice cut the blue with its dark line. It was from that height the suicide had jumped. I thought of him there, standing on the window ledge, making ready to leap. Ugh! it was too horrible! I shuddered and walked on, pressing my chin into my fur and putting the picture out of my mind.

When I turned the corner into Broadway it was brighter. The sun was shining on the outspread wings of the eagle in his niche and turning the icicles that hung from the window ledges into golden fringes. Near the entrance a man in a checked jumper and peaked cap was breaking away the bits of ice that stuck to the sidewalk with a long-handled thing like a spade. And all about were people, queer, mangy-looking men and some women, standing staring at the pavement

and then craning their necks and squinting up through the sunlight at the top of the building.

I sized up the man in the jumper as a janitor, and for all he seemed so busy, you could see he was really hanging round for an excuse to talk. He'd pick at a tiny piece of ice and skate it over careful into the gutter when in ordinary times he'd have let it lie there, a menace to the public's bones. Every now and then one of the people standing round would ask him a question and he'd stop in his scraping and try to look weary while he was just bursting to go all over it again.

"Where did he fall?" asked a chap in a reach-me-down overcoat, fringing at the cuffs, "there?" and pointed into the middle of the street. The janitor gave him a scornful glance, let go his hoe and spat on his hand. He spoke with a brogue:

"No, not there. Nor there neither," he pointed some distance down Broadway. "But there," and that time he struck on the edge of the curb with his hoe.

A girl who was passing slowed up, her face all puckered with horror:

"Did he come down with a crash?"

The janitor drew himself up, raised his eyebrows and looked at her from under his eyelids like she was a worm:

"Is fallin' from the top of the buildin' like steppin' from a limousine on to a feather bed?" He turned wearily to his hoe and spoke to it as if it was the only thing in sight that had any sense. "Crash! What'll they be after askin' next?" Then he suddenly got quite excited, raised his voice and stuck out his chin at the girl. "Why, the glasses off his nose was nearly to the next corner. Didn't I meself find the mounts of them six feet from his body? And not a bit of glass left. There's where I got them—in the mud," he pointed out into the street and everyone looked fixedly at the place. "Crash—and the pore corpse no more than a sack of bones."

An old man with a white beard who'd been standing on the curb examining the street as if he expected to find a treasure there said:

"Struck on his head, eh?"

"He did," said the janitor in a loud voice. "An' if you'd listen to me you'd have known it without me tellin' yer."

The girl, who was sort of peeved at the way he answered her, spoke up:

"You never told it at all! You only spoke about the glasses."

The janitor gave her a look sort of enduring and patient as if, she being a woman, he'd got to treat her gentle even if she was a fool.

"Say, young lady," says he, "I'm not goin' to bandy words with you. Have it any way you like. *I* was here, *I* seen it, *I* seen the corpse lyin' all bunched up, *I* seen the crowd, *I* seen the amberlanch, and *I* seen Mr. Harland's clerk come down and identify the body—but maybe *I* don't know. Take it or leave it—any way you

choose."

The people snickered and looked at the girl, who got red and walked off muttering. The janitor went back to picking at a piece of ice as big as a half dollar, watching out for the next one to come along.

I hadn't phoned to Iola this time and it being an unusual occasion I decided to go up. There were men in the entrance hall talking together in groups and from every group I could hear the name of Harland coming in low tones. In the elevator when the other passengers had got out, the boy looked at me and said:

"Tough what happened here last night, ain't it?"

I agreed with him and as we shot up with the floors flashing between the iron grills, *he* had *his* little say about it. One of the things that seemed to trouble him most was that he hadn't been there, as the express elevator which he ran was broken early in the afternoon and he'd gone home before the event.

The corridor of the seventeenth floor was a bare, clean place, all shining stone, not a bit of wood about it but the doors. At one end was a window looking out on the Broadway side and near it the stairs went down, concrete with a metal balustrade. I'd asked for Miss Whitehall's office and as I got out of the car the boy had said, "First door to your left, Azalea Woods Estates." There were two doors on each side, the upper halves ground glass with gold lettering. Those to the right had "The Hudson Electrical Company" on them and those to the left "Azalea Woods Estates" with under that "Anthony Ford, Manager."

As I walked toward the first of these I could see out of the window the great back of the Massasoit Building, tan color against the bright blue of the sky. Pausing before I rang the bell, I leaned against the window ledge and spied down. The street looked like a small, narrow gully, dotted with tiny black figures, and the houses that fronted on it, extending back to the Massasoit, no bigger than match boxes.

I pressed the bell and as I waited turned and looked down the corridor, stretching away in its shiny scoured cleanness between the shut doors of offices. Just beyond the elevator shafts there was a branch hall and along the polished floor I could see the white, glassy reflection of another window. That was on the side street, one of those I had looked up at, and as I was thinking that, the door opened slowly and Iola peered out, with her eyes big and scared and a sandwich in her hand.

"Good gracious, Molly!" she cried. "I'm so glad to see you. Come in."

I hesitated, almost whispering:

"Will Miss Whitehall mind?"

"She's not here. I had a phone this morning to say she was sick and wouldn't be down, and Mr. Ford's gone out to lunch." She took me by the hand and pulled me in, shutting the door. "Jerusalem, but it's good to see you. I'm that lonesome sitting here I'm ready to cry."

She didn't look very chipper. Usually she's a pretty girl, the slim, baby-eyed, delicate kind, with a dash of powder on the nose and a touch of red on the lips to help out. But today she looked sort of peaked and shriveled up, the way those frail little wisps of girls do at the least jar.

"Isn't it awful?" she said as soon as she'd got me in—"Just the floor above us!"

I didn't want her to talk about it, but she was like the janitor—only a gag would stop her. So I let her run on while I looked round and took in the place.

It was a fine, large room, two windows in the front and two more on the sides. The furniture was massive and rich-looking and the rugs on the floor as soft to your foot as the turf in the Park. On the walls were blue and white maps, criss-crossed with lines, and pictures of houses, in different styles. But the thing that got me was a little model of a cottage on a table by the window. It was the cutest thing you ever saw—all complete even to the blinds in the windows and the awning over the piazza. I was looking at it when Iola, having got away with the sandwich, said:

"Come on in to Mr. Ford's office while I finish my lunch. I got to get through with it before he comes back."

I followed her into the next room, nearly as large as the one we'd been in, with a wide window and in the center a big roll-top desk. On the edge of this stood a pasteboard box, with some crumpled wax paper in it and an orange. Iola sat down in the swivel chair and picking up the orange began to peel it.

"I hardly ever do this," she explained, "but I thought Miss Whitehall wouldn't mind today as I felt so mean I couldn't face going out to lunch. And then it was all right as she won't be down and I'll have it all cleared off before Mr. Ford comes back."

"Would he be mad?"

You ought to have seen the look she gave me.

"Mad—Tony Ford? It's easy seen you don't know him. She wouldn't say anything either. She's awful considerate. But she's so sort of grand and dignified you don't like to ask favors off her."

"Was she here when it happened last night?"

"I don't know, but I guess not. She generally leaves a little before six. Thanks be to goodness, she told me I could go home early yesterday. I was out of the

building by half-past five." She broke the orange apart and held out a piece. "Have a quarter?" I shook my head and she went on. "We're all out of here soon after six. Tony Ford generally stays last and shuts up. Did you see all the papers this morning?"

"Most of them. Why?"

"I was wondering if any of them knew that Mr. Harland and Mr. Barker were both in here yesterday afternoon."

"It wasn't in any of the papers I saw."

"Well, they were—the two of them. And I didn't know but what the reporters, nosing round for anything the way they do, mightn't have heard it. Not that there was anything out of the ordinary about it. She knew them both. Mr. Harland's been in here a few times and Mr. Barker often."

"Why did *he* come?" I said, surprised, for Iola had never told me they'd the magnate for a customer.

"Business," she looked at me over the orange that she was sucking, her eyes sort of intent and curious. "Didn't I tell you that? He was going to buy a piece of land in the Azalea Woods Estates and build a house for his niece."

"Seems to me," I said, "that the press'll be interested to know about those two visits."

"Well, if any reporters come snooping round here Tony Ford told me to refer them to him or Miss Whitehall, and that's what I'm going to do."

"What time was Mr. Harland here?"

"A little after four. He and Miss Whitehall went into the private office and had a talk. And I'll bet a new hat that he hadn't no more idea of suicide then than you have now, sitting there before me. When he came out he was all smiles, just as natural and happy as if he was going home to a chicken dinner and a show afterward."

"All the papers think it was what Mr. Barker said that drove him to it."

"And they're right for a change—not that I'm saying anything against the press with your husband in it. But it does make more mistakes than any printed matter *I* ever read, except the cooking receipts on the outside of patent foods. It was Barker that put the crimp in *him*."

"Then Barker came in afterward?"

"Yes, just before I left. And he and she went into the private office."

I turned in my chair and looked through the open doorway into the third room of the suite.

"Is that the private office?" I asked.

"Yes," says Iola with a giggle, "that's its society name, but Mr. Ford calls it the Surgery."

Before I could ask her why Mr. Ford called it that, the bell rang and she jumped up, squashing the orange peel and bits of paper back in the box.

"Here, you go and answer it," I said, "I'll hide this." She went into the front office and as I pushed the box out of sight on a shelf I could hear her talking to a man at the door. The conversation made me stand still listening.

The man's voice asked for Miss Whitehall, Iola answering that she wasn't there.

"Where is she?" said the man, gruff and abrupt it seemed to me.

"In her own home—she hasn't come down today at all."

"Is she coming later?"

"No, she's sick in bed."

There was a slight pause and then he said:

"Well, I got to see her. I've notes here that are overdue and the endorsee's dead."

"Endorsee?" came Iola's little pipe, full of troubled surprise, "who's he?"

"Hollings Harland who killed himself last night. What's her address?"

I could hear Iola giving it and the man muttering it over. Then there was a gruff "Good morning" and the door snapped shut.

Iola came back, her eyes big, her expression wondering.

"What do you suppose that means?" she said.

I didn't know exactly myself but—notes, endorsee dead!—it had a bad sound. As Iola reached down her lunch box and tied it up, talking uneasily about the man and what he'd wanted, I remembered the gossip in New Jersey when Miss Whitehall started her land scheme. There'd been rumors then that maybe she was backed, and if Hollings Harland had been behind it—My goodness! you couldn't tell what might happen. But I wasn't going to say anything discouraging to Iola, so to change the subject I moved to the door of the private office and looked in.

"Why does Mr. Ford call this the surgery?"

At the mention of the managing clerk Iola brightened up and said with a smirk:

"Because it's where Miss Whitehall chloroforms her clients with her beauty and performs the operation of separating them from their money. He's always saying cute things like that."

We stood in the doorway and looked in. It was a smaller room than the others, but furnished just as richly, with a mahogany center table, big leather-covered armchairs and photographs of foreign views on the walls. In one corner



was an elegant, gold-embossed screen, that, when I spied behind it, I saw hid a washstand. It was the last room of the suite and had only one door that led into the office we'd been sitting in. In the outside wall was a window from which you could see way over the city—a wonderful view.

I walked to it and looked out. Over the roofs and chimneys I caught a glimpse of the Hudson, a silvery gleam, and the Hoboken hills beyond. Pressing my forehead against the glass I glimpsed down the sheer drop of the walls to the roof of a church—a flat, black oblong with a squatty dome at one end—squeezed as close as it could get against the lower stories. Back of that were old houses, dwellings that would soon be swept away, the yards behind them narrow strips with the separating fences as small as lines made by a pencil.

I was so interested that for a moment I forgot Lola, but she brought me back with a jerk.

"It was in the room above this that Mr. Harland was sitting with Mr. Barker, before it happened."

"You don't say," I answered. "Is it like this?"

"Exactly the same. I've seen it—one day when the boss was away and I went up with Della Franks. They were in there just as we are in here and then he went out this way—"

The door had been partly pushed to and she started to illustrate how he had left the room, brushing round its edge. Something caught her, there was a sound of ripping and she stopped, clapping her hand on her back:

"There go my pleats—Ding it!" she craned round over her shoulder trying to see the back of her skirt. "What's got me? Oh, the key. Well what do you make of that—caught me like a hook."

She drew her dress off the key, which fell out of the lock on to the floor.

"It's only ripped," I said consolingly. "I can pin it for you."

"Well, there's always something to be thankful for," she said, as I pinned her up. "But it's an unlucky day, I can feel *that*. That key's never before been on the inside of the door." She bent and picked it up. "I'd like to know what smart Aleck changed it."

"Probably the scrubwoman."

"I guess so," she grumbled, "put it on the wrong side where it waited patiently and then got its revenge on me. Such is life among the lowly."

That night Babbitts was late for dinner. I expected it but Isabella, who says she never lived out except in families where the husband comes home at six like a Christian, was getting restive about the chops, when he finally showed up, tired as a dog.

"My Lord!" he said, as I helped him off with his coat. "What a day!"

"Because of the suicide?"

"Outcome of the suicide and all the rest of it. The wildest panic on the Street. The Copper Pool's gone smash. Let's have something to eat. I've had no lunch and I'm famished."

When we were at table and the edge off his hunger he told me more:

"It began this morning, and this afternoon when there was still no trace of Barker—Gee whizz! it was an avalanche."

"You mean he's *gone*? Disappeared?"

"That's the way it looks. They had their suspicions when they couldn't find him last night. And today—nobody knows a thing about him at his house or his office, can't account for it, don't understand. Then we turned up something that looked like a clincher. One of his motors, a limousine, and his chauffeur, fellow called Heney, have disappeared too."

"What do they say about that at the house?"

"Same thing—know nothing. Nobody was in the garage from six to half-past eight. When the other men who sleep there came back Heney and the limousine were gone."

"Did anyone see Barker at the Black Eagle Building?"

"No—that's the strongest proof that he's decamped. You'd suppose with such a scene as that going on he'd have shown up. But not a soul's been found who saw him there. If he wanted to slip out quietly he could easily have done it. Jerome and the Franks girl say they were so paralyzed they never gave him another thought and he could have passed behind them, as they stood in the corridor, and gone down by the side stairs. There's another flight round the corner on the branch hall. The street on that side was deserted—the boys say every human being in the neighborhood was round on the Broadway front."

"But, but," I stammered, for I couldn't understand it all, "what's he done? What's the reason for his going?"

"Reason!" said Babbitts with a snort. "Believe me, there's reason enough. Somebody's welched on the Copper Pool and they think it's he and that he's disappeared with twenty million."

"Twenty million! How could he?"

"By selling out on the rest of the crowd. They think he's been selling copper to the Pool itself of which he was the head."

"Was that what he and Mr. Harland were supposed to be quarreling about yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes. The idea now is that Harland, who was one of the Copper crowd, suspected and accused him, that there was a fierce interview in the course of which the lawyer realized he was beaten and ruined."

"Good gracious!" I said. "What are they going to do with him?"

"If he doesn't show up, go after him. A group of ruined financiers doesn't kneel down and pray for their money to come back. And they've got a man looking after their interests who's a lightning striker. A friend of yours. Guess who?"

"Wilbur Whitney!" I crowed.

"The same," said Babbitts.

"Then," I cried, "they'll have him and the twenty millions served up on a salver before the week's out."

If you don't know the story of the Hesketh Mystery you don't know who Wilbur Whitney is, so I'll tell you here. He's one of the biggest lawyers in New York and one of the biggest men anywhere. You'd as soon suspect that an insignificant atom like me would know a man like him as that the palace ashman would know the Czar of Russia, but I do, well—I guess I'm not stretching things if I say we're friends. The Babbitts and the Whitneys don't exchange calls, but they think a lot of each other just the same. And it's my doing, little Molly's—yes, sir, the ex-telephone girl. In the Hesketh case I did a job for Mr. Whitney that brought us together, and ever since it's been kindnesses from the big house off Fifth Avenue, to the little flat on Ninety-fifth Street. He doesn't forget—the real eighteen-carat people never do—and he'll send me tickets for the opera one night and tip off Soapy to a bit of news so he'll get a scoop the week after. Oh, he's just *grand*!

And right in his office—Mr. Whitney's assistant this year—is one of our realest, truest, dearest pals, Jack Reddy. If this is your first acquaintance with me you don't know much about him and I'll have to give you a little sketch of him for he's got a lot to do with this story.

To look at he's just all right, brown with light-colored hair and gray eyes, over six feet and not an ounce of fat on him. It's not because he's my friend that I'm saying all this, everybody agrees on it. He's thirty years old now and not married. That's because of a tragedy in his life: the girl he loved was killed nearly three years ago. It's a long story—I can't stop to tell it to you—but it broke him up something dreadful, though I and Babbitts and all of us know it was better that he shouldn't have married her. Ever since I've been hoping he'd meet up with his real affinity, someone who'd be the right woman for him. But he hasn't so far. Babbitts says the girl isn't born I'd think good enough—but I don't know. I guess in the ninety millions of people we've got scattered round this vast republic there's

a lady that'll fill the bill.

Once I had a crush on him—Babbitts teases me about it now—but it all faded away when Himself came along with his curly blond hair and his dear, rosy, innocent face. But Jack Reddy's still a sort of hero to me. He showed up so fine in those old dark days and he's showed up fine ever since—don't drop off his pedestal and have to be boosted back. I've put several people on pedestals and seen them so unsteady it made me nervous, but he's riveted on.

He's got a country place out in New Jersey—Firehill—where he used to live. But since he's been with Mr. Whitney he stays in town, only going out there in summer. His apartment's down near Gramercy Park—an elegant place—where his two old servants, David and Joanna Gilsey, keep house for him and treat him like he was their only son. Babbitts and I go there often, and Gee, we do have some eats!

"Well," I said, wagging my head proud and confident at Babbitts, "if Wilbur Whitney and Jack Reddy are out to find that Barker man, they'll do it if he burrows through to China."

# CHAPTER III

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

The appalling suicide of Hollings Harland, followed by the non-appearance of Johnston Barker, precipitated one of the most spectacular smashes Wall Street had seen since the day of the Northern Pacific corner. It began slowly, but as the day advanced and no news of Barker was forthcoming it became a snowslide, for the rumor flew through the city that there had been a "welcher" in the pool and that the welcher was its head—Barker himself.

For years the man had loomed large in the public eye. He was between fifty and sixty, small, wiry, made of iron and steel with a nerve nothing could shake. Like so many of our big capitalists, he had begun life in the mining camps of the far Northwest, had never married, and had kept his doors shut on the world that tried to force his seclusion. Among his rivals he was famed for his daring, his ruthless courage and his almost uncanny foresight. He was a financial genius, the making of money, his life. But as one coup after another jostled the Street, the wiseacres wagged their heads and said "Some day!" It *looked* now as if the day had come. But that such a man had double-crossed his associates and cleaned them out of twenty millions seemed incredible.

It was especially hard to believe—for us I mean—as on the morning of January 15 he had been in the Whitney offices conferring with the chief on business. His manner was as cool and non-committal as usual, his head full of plans that stretched out into the future. Nothing in his words or actions suggested the gambler concentrated on his last and most tremendous coup. Only as he left he made a remark, that afterward struck us as significant. It was in answer to a query of the chief's about the Copper Pool:

"There are developments ahead—maybe sensational. You'll see in a day or two."

It was the second day after the suicide and in the afternoon, having a job to see to on the upper West Side, I decided to drop in on Molly Babbitts and have a word with her. I always drop in on Molly when I happen to be round her diggings. Three years ago, after the calamity which pretty nearly put a quietus on me for all time, Molly and I clasped hands on a friendship pact that, God willing, will last till the grass is growing over both of us. She's the brightest, biggest-hearted, bravest little being that walks, and once did me a good turn. But I needn't speak of that—it's a page I don't like to turn back. It's enough to say that whatever Molly asks me is done and always will be as long as I've breath in my body.

As I swung up the long reach of Central Park West—she's a few blocks in from there on Ninety-fifth Street—my thoughts, circling round the Harland affair, brought up on Miss Whitehall, whose offices are just below those of the dead man. I wondered if she'd been there and hoped she hadn't, a nasty business for a woman to see. I'd met her several times—before she started the Azalea Woods Estates scheme—at the house of a friend near Longwood and been a good deal impressed as any man would. She was one of the handsomest women I'd ever seen, dark and tall, twenty-five or -six years of age and a lady to her finger tips. I was just laying round in my head for an excuse to call on her when the villa site business loomed up and she and her mother whisked away to town. That was the last I saw of them, and my fell design of calling never came off—what was decent civility in the country, in the town looked like butting in. Bashful? Oh, probably. Maybe I'd have been bolder if she'd been less good-looking.

Molly was at home, and had to give me tea, and here were Soapy's cigars and there were Soapy's cigarettes. Blessed little jolly soul, she welcomes you as if you were Admiral Dewey returning from Manila Bay. Himself was at the Harland inquest and maybe he and the boys would be in, as the inquest was to be held at Harland's house on Riverside Drive. So as we chatted she made ready for them—on the chance. That's Molly too.

As she ran in and out of the kitchen she told me of a visit she'd paid the day before to Miss Whitehall's office and let drop a fact that gave me pause. While she was there a man had come with a note from some bank which, from her description, seemed to be protested. That was a surprise, but what was a greater was that Harland had been the endorsee. Out Longwood way there'd been a good deal of speculation as to how the Whitehalls had financed so pretentious a scheme. Men I knew there were of the opinion there had been a silent partner. If it was Harland—who had a finger in many pies—the enterprise was doomed. I sat back

puffing one of Babbitts' cigars and pondering. Why the devil *hadn't* I called? If it was true, I might have been of some help to them.

Before I had time to question her further, the hall door opened and Babbitts came in with a trail of three reporters at his heels. I knew them all—Freddy Jaspar, of the *Sentinel*, who three years ago had tried to fix the Hesketh murder on me and had taken twelve months to get over the agony of meeting me, Jones, of the *Clarion*, and Bill Yerrington, star reporter of a paper which, when it couldn't get its headlines big enough without crowding out the news, printed them in blood red.

They had come from the inquest and clamored for food and drink, crowding round the table and keeping Molly, for all her preparations, swinging like a pendulum between the kitchen and the dining-room. I was keen to hear what had happened, and as she whisked in with Jaspar's tea and Babbitts' coffee, a beer for Yerrington and the whiskey for Jones, they began on it.

There'd been a bunch of witnesses—the janitor, the elevator boy, Harland's stenographer who'd had hysterics, and Jerome, his head clerk, who'd identified the body and had revealed an odd fact not noticed at the time. The front hall window of the eighteenth story—the window Harland was supposed to have jumped from—had been closed when Jerome ran into the hall.

"Jerome's positive he opened it," said Babbitts. "He said he remembered jerking it up and leaning out to look at the crowd on the street."

"How do they account for that?" I asked. "Harland couldn't have stood on the sill and shut it behind him."

Jaspar explained:

"No—It wasn't that window. He went to the floor below, the seventeenth. The janitor, going up there an hour afterward, found the hall window on the seventeenth floor wide open."

"That's an odd thing," I said—"going down one story."

"You can't apply the ordinary rules of behavior to men in Harland's state," said Jones. "They're way off the normal. I remember one of my first details was the suicide of a woman, who killed herself by swallowing a key when she had a gun handy. They get wild and act wild."

Yerrington, who was famous for injecting a sinister note into the most commonplace happenings, spoke up:

"The window's easily explained. What is queer is the length of time that elapsed between his leaving the office and his fall to the street. That Franks girl, when she wasn't whooping like a siren in a fog, said it was 6.05 when he went out. At twenty-five to seven the body fell—half an hour later." He looked at me with a

dark glance. "What did he do during that time?"

"I'll tell you in two words," said Jaspar. "Stop and think for a moment. What was that man's mental state? He's ruined—he's played a big game and lost. But life's been sweet to him—up till now it's given him everything he asked for. There's a struggle between the knowledge that death is the best way out and the desire to live."

"To express it in language more suited to our simple intellects," said Jones, "he's taken half an hour to make up his mind."

"Precisely."

"Where did he spend that half hour?" said Yerrington, in a deep, meaningful voice.

"Hi, you Yerrington," cried Babbitts, "this isn't a case for posing as Burns on the Trail. What's the matter with him spending it in the seventeenth floor hall?"

Molly, who was sitting at the head of the table in a mess of cups and steaming pots, colored the picture.

"Pacing up and down, trying to get up his nerve. Oh, I can see him perfectly!"

"Strange," said Yerrington, looking somberly at the droplight, "that no one saw him pacing there."

"A great deal stranger if they had," cut in Jones, "considering there was no one there to see. It was after six—the offices were empty."

They had the laugh on Yerrington who muttered balefully, dipping into his glass.

"It fits in with the character of Harland," I said, "the stuff in the papers, all you hear about him. He was an intellect first—cool, resolute, hard as a stone. That kind of man doesn't act on impulse. As Mrs. Babbitts says, he probably paced up and down the empty corridor with his vision ranging over the situation, arguing it out with himself and deciding death was the best way. Then up with the window and out."

"Do you suppose Mr. Barker had any idea he was going to do it when he left?" Molly asked.

Babbitts laughed.

"Ask us an easier one, Molly."

Jaspar answered her, looking musingly at the smoke of his cigarette.

"I guess Barker wasn't bothering much about anybody just then. His own get-away was occupying *his* thoughts."

"You're confident he's lit out?" said Jones.



"What else? Why, if he wasn't lying low in that back room, didn't he come out when he heard Miss Franks' screams? Why hasn't he showed up since? Where is he? That idea they've got in his office that he may have had aphasia or been kidnapped is all tommyrot. They've got to say something and they say that. The time was ripe for his disappearance and things worked out right for him to make it then and there. If he didn't slip out while Miss Franks and Jerome were at the hall window, he did it after they'd gone down. It was nearly an hour before the police went up. He could have taken his time, quietly descended the side stairs and picked up his auto which was waiting in some place he'd designated."

"That's the dope," said Babbitts. "And it won't be many more 'sleeps,' as the Indians say, before that car is run to earth. You can't hide a man and a French limousine for long."

He was right. Johnston Barker's car was located the next day and the public knew that the head of the Copper Pool had disappeared by design and intention. His clerks and friends who had desperately suggested loss of memory, kidnapping, accident, were silenced. Their protesting voices died before evidence that was conclusive. Judge for yourself.

On the morning of January the eighteenth, Heney, the chauffeur, turned up in the Newark court, telling a story that bore the stamp of truth. At five o'clock on the day of the suicide he had received a phone message in the garage from Barker. This message instructed him to take the limousine that evening at 8.15 to the corner of Twenty-second Street and Ninth Avenue. There he was to wait for his employer, but not in any ordinary way. The directions were explicit and, in the light of subsequent events, illuminating. He was not to stop but to move about the locality, watching for Barker. When he saw him he was to run along the curb, slowing down sufficiently for the older man to enter the car.

From there he was to proceed to the Jersey Ferry, cross and continue on to Elizabeth. The objective point in Elizabeth was the railway depot, but instead of going straight to it, the car was to stop at the foot of the embankment on the Pennsylvania side, where Barker would alight. Further instructions were that Heney was to mention the matter to no one, and if asked on the following day of Barker's whereabouts, deny all knowledge of it. Pay for his discretion was promised.

Heney said he was astonished, as he had been in Barker's employment two years and never piloted the magnate on any such mysterious enterprise. But he did what he was told, sure of his money and trusting in his boss. At the corner of the two streets he saw no one, looped the block, and on his return made out a figure moving toward him that slowed up as he came in sight. He ran closer

and by the light of a lamp recognized Barker; and skirted the curb as he'd been ordered. With a nod and glance at him, Barker opened the car door and entered.

The run to Elizabeth was made without incident. Heney stopped the car at the Pennsylvania side of the culvert, above which the station lights shone. Barker alighted and with a short "Good night" mounted the steps to the depot.

On the way home, going at high speed, Heney, rounding a corner, ran into a wagon and found himself face to face with a pair of angry farmers. They haled him before a magistrate to whom he gave a false name, representing himself as a chauffeur joy-riding in a borrowed car. He told this lie hoping to be able to hush the matter up the next day.

When he read of his boss' disappearance in the papers he was uneasy, knowing discovery could not be long postponed. The number of the car—overlooked in the rush of bigger matters—was made public in the evening papers of the seventeenth. Then he knew the game was up, admitted his deception and the identity of his employer.

Inquiries at the Elizabeth depot confirmed his story. The Jersey Central and Pennsylvania tracks run side by side through the station. At nine-thirty on the night of January fifteenth the ticket agent of the Pennsylvania Line remembered selling a Philadelphia ticket to a man answering the description of Barker. He did not see this man board the train, being busy at the time in his office. None of the train officials had any recollection of such a passenger, but as the coaches were full, the coming and going of people continuous, he might easily have been overlooked.

After this there was no more doubt as to Barker's flight. The papers announced it to an amazed public, shaken to its core by the downfall of one of its financial giants. The collapse of the Copper Pool was complete and Wall Street rocked in the last throes of panic. From the wreckage the voices of victims called down curses on the traitor, the man who had planned the ruin of his associates and got away with it.

They congregated in the Whitney office where the air was sulphurous with their fury. And from the Whitney office the Whitney detectives, Jerry O'Mally at their head, slipped away to Philadelphia, with their noses to the trail. With his picture on the front page of every paper in the country it would be hard for Barker to elude them, but he had three days' start, and, as O'Mally summed it up, "It has only taken seven to make the world."

# CHAPTER IV

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

The day after the Harland inquest I meant to go down and see Iola and find out if she'd heard anything from Miss Whitehall. But that day I got sidetracked some way or other and the next it rained.

Usually I don't mind rain, but this was the real wet, straight kind that would get in at you if you wore a diver's suit. As I stood at the parlor window, looking down at the street all pools and puddles, with the walls shining under a thin glaze of water, and the umbrellas like wet, black mushrooms, I got faint-hearted. I could just as well phone, and if anything had transpired (it was the business I was uneasy about) go down and help Iola through the fit of blind staggers she'd be bound to have.

So presently it was:

"Hello, Iola, I was coming down today but it's too moistuous."

Then Iola's voice, sort of groaning:

"Oh, Molly, is that you? I *do* wish it had been fine and you'd have come."

"Why—anything wrong?"

"Oh, yes, everything. Miss Whitehall isn't back yet, and Mr. Ford's hardly been in at all and has such a gloom on him you wouldn't know him, and I'm awful discouraged."

"Have you tried to see Miss Whitehall?"

"No, I can't seem to get up enough spunk."

"Why don't you phone her?"

"Well, I don't know, I'm sort of scared of what I'll hear. I thought I'd better sit around and wait, and then I thought I ought to find out, and between the two—Oh, dear, *what's the use!*"

That was just like Iola. The only way you can be sure she's got a mind at all is the trouble she has making it up. If it's true that men like the helpless kind she ought to have a string of lovers as long as the line at the box office when Caruso sings *Pagliacci*. I wonder *I* ever got married!

"Tell you what, girlie," I said, "you come up tonight and dine with me. Himself is going to be late and we two bandits will steal out after dinner and make a raid on Miss Whitehall's."

Even then she hung back. I had to coax and urge and it was only me promising I'd see her through and if necessary ask the questions, made her finally agree.

The rain held on all day and it was teeming when we started out. Miss Whitehall's flat was on the other side of town—the East Sixties—and we had to go round the Park, crowding on and off cars, fighting our way through packs of people, Iola clawing at my back and catching her umbrella in men's hats and women's hair till you'd think she did it on purpose. When we got to the street we turned east, walking from Madison Avenue over Park with its great huge apartment houses, and then on a ways—not far, but far enough to make you feel Miss Whitehall's home wasn't as stylishly located as her office. Iola was that nervous I was afraid she'd forget the number, but we found it, on a corner over a drug store, where there were large, glassy bottles in the window and advertisements of ladies offering pills and candy with such glad, inviting smiles you'd know it was damaged stock.

The entrance was round on the side, and as we stood in the vestibule, dimly lit, with a line of letter boxes on each side, I couldn't help but whisper:

"You'd never think from her offices she'd live over a store."

And Iola answered, pushing the button under a letter box marked "Mrs. Serena Whitehall."

"It's a shock to me. I'd no more connect her with a push-button than I would you with a glass-topped entrance and a man in knee pants."

The door clicked and we went up the stairs, one feeble little electric bulb furnishing the light. There was a smell in the air like one of the tenants had had lamb stew for dinner and another was smoking the kind of cigar that tells you it's strong and hearty half a block off. The first-floor landing was hers—a card in a frame by the door told us so—and we pressed on the bell, hearing it give a loud, whirring ring inside.

The door was opened by a young girl, very neat in a black dress and white apron. She was sure we couldn't speak to Miss Whitehall, but perhaps Mrs. Whitehall would see us and she showed us up the tiny little hall into the dining-room. I'd never have believed a room furnished so plain could be so elegant. There

was a square of brown carpet on the floor and ecru linen curtains—no lace, just hemstitched—at the windows and on the side table some silver; yet it had a refined, classy look. Two doors opened from it, one into the hall hung with a blue portière and double ones that I guessed led into the parlor. We could hear voices coming from there, low and murmuring.

By this time Iola was that nervous she was licking her lips with her tongue like a baby that's had a sugar stick. I was just edging round to give her a dig and whisper, "Brace up," when the curtain into the hall was lifted and a lady came in.

As she was well along in years—near to fifty I'd say—I knew she was Mrs. Whitehall. She was very dignified and gentle, with black hair turning gray and lots of lines on her forehead and round her eyes, which were dark like her hair and had a sad, weary expression. I guessed she'd been handsome once, but she looked as if she'd had her troubles, and when I heard her voice, low and so quiet, there was something in it that made me feel she was having them still.

I'd promised to be spokesman and not seeing any reason to waste time I went straight to the point. Mrs. Whitehall stood listening, her hands clasped on the back of a chair, her eyes on the little fern plant in the center of the table.

"Perhaps it would be best," she said, in that soft, faded sort of voice, "if Miss Barry were to see my daughter. I hardly know what to say to her."

She turned and left the room by the hall door and Iola gasped at me:

"Oh, Molly, it's true!"

"Don't cross your bridges till you come to them," I said, but all the same, I thought it looked bad.

"What'll I do if the business shuts down?"

"Shut up till you know if it does," I whispered back.

The double doors rolled back and Mrs. Whitehall stood between them. She looked at Iola.

"If you'll come in here, Miss Barry," she said, "my daughter will see you."

It was plain she didn't expect me, so I stood by the table without moving. As Mrs. Whitehall drew back and before Iola got to the doorway, there was a moment when I saw into the room. It looked real artistic, flowered cretonne curtains, wicker chairs with cushions and low bookcases around the walls, the whole lit up by the yellow glow of lamps. But I wasn't interested in the furniture—what caught my eye was a couch just opposite the open door, on which a woman was lying.

There was a lamp on a stand beside her and its light fell full over her. If I hadn't known Carol Whitehall was there I'd have guessed right off it was she from the likeness to her mother. She had just the same hair and deep, rich-looking

eyes except in her the hair was black as night and the eyes were young. She had a newspaper in her hand and as the doors opened she'd looked up, intent and questioning, and I saw she was beautiful. She was like a picture, leaning forward with that inquiring expression, her features clear in the flood of soft light. I got an impression of her then that I've never forgotten—of force and strength. It didn't come from anything especial in her face, but from something in her general makeup, something vivid and warm, like she was alive straight through.

They stayed in the room some time while I sat waiting. I'd sized up everything in sight, especially two little glass lamps on the sideboard that I thought would be a nice present for Babbitts to give me on my next birthday, when the doors slid back and Iola came in. She didn't say anything and seemed in a hurry to be off. Mrs. Whitehall showed us out, very polite but depressed, and when the door was shut on us and we stole down the stairs, I felt the worst had come. In the vestibule I looked at Iola and said: "Well?"

She was struggling with her umbrella, her face bent over it.

"Fired!" she answered in a husky voice.

The rain was coming down in torrents, and wanting to cuddle up comforting against her, I didn't raise my umbrella and we walked up the street, squeezed together, with the downpour spattering around us. Believe me, the water fell under Iola's umbrella pretty nearly as heavy as it did outside it. Miss Whitehall was broke. Mr. Harland *had* been her financial backer and now she was ruined and the business would close. The surprise and horror of the whole thing had prostrated her and as soon as she was better she'd wind up the Azalea Woods Estates and try and sublet her offices, on which she had still a six months' lease.

"She was awful sweet," Iola sobbed. "She gave me a full month's salary and said she'd meant to keep me forever. Oh, Molly, why did it have to happen?"

I squeezed her and said:

"That's all right, dearie. We'll all hustle and get you another job. I got lots of money and what's mine's yours—the way it always is between good and true friends."

But Iola wouldn't be comforted.

"I can't take your money. I never took a cent yet. And I thought I was fixed for life. I thought even if the business didn't pan out big she'd marry Mr. Barker and get a place for me."

"Marry Mr. Barker!" I cried out astonished.

"Yes—that's what I thought was coming."

Believe *me*, I was surprised. She'd never dropped a hint of it.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" I asked.

"Because Tony Ford told me not to. He said I wasn't to tell anybody—that Barker being such a big bug it would get in the papers and that might break it all up."

"But are you *sure*? Did he act like he was in love with her?"

We were passing one of those arc lights on Park Avenue, and the scornful look she cast at me, tears and all, was plain.

"Wouldn't you think a man was in love—even if he was a magnate—who'd buy a house and lot just for an excuse to *see* a lady?"

"Did you ever *hear* him making love to her?"

"No—but I didn't need to. I've been made love to enough myself to know the signs without hearing. First it was all business, and I believed it was only that. Then, one day when Mr. Ford was out, he came in and lingered round making conversation. You know the way they do it, and for all he was a magnate Mr. Barker was just the same as the errand boy. That's the way it is with men—they got no variety. He wanted to know about her home and the farm and before that. Oh, Indiana, a fine state, Indiana! It made me laugh to see him with his hook nose and gray hair handing out the same line of talk that Billy Dunn gave me when I was in the linen envelope place."

"Did *she* seem to care for him?"

"Not at first. She was very formal, just a bow and then right off about the bungalow. But *he* had the symptoms from the start—looking at her like he couldn't take his eyes off and not caring whether the bungalow was as small as a hencoop or as big as the Waldorf.

"They went along that way for a while then something happened—a fight, I guess when Tony Ford and I weren't there. Anyhow, after it she was so cold and distant you'd wonder he had the nerve to come. Then one afternoon he came in and asked her low—I heard him—if he could have a few words with her in the private office. She hesitated but I guess she couldn't see her way to refusing, so in they went and had a long powwow. Whatever it was they said to each other it smoothed out all the wrinkles. After that she was as different to him as summer is to winter. In my own mind I thought they were engaged, for she'd brighten up when he came in and *smile*. I never saw her smile like that at anyone, and once when they thought I couldn't hear I heard him call her 'dear.' They'd go into the private office and talk. Gee! how they talked! And always low like they were afraid Tony Ford and I might overhear. And on the top of all *that* he disappears."

"Perhaps that's why she's been sick."

"Sure it is. It's bad enough to lose your own money, but wouldn't it make you sick to lose millions, let alone the man you're in love with, even if he has a

nose you could hang an umbrella on?"

"Poor thing!" I said, for I could see now what the lady lying on the couch had been up against.

"We're all poor things," said Iola, beginning to get sorry for herself again. "Miss Whitehall, and the man that's dead, and Tony Ford who's lost his job, and me, poor unfortunate me, that I thought was on velvet for the rest of my days."

Babbitts didn't get home till late that night, but I was so full of what Iola had said that I waited up for him. When he did come, he hadn't but one kiss, when I pulled away from him and told him.

"Doesn't it seem to you, Soapy," I said, "that that story ought to go back to Mr. Whitney?"

He looked at me sideways with a sly, questioning glance.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why, if Barker's in love with her don't you think maybe he'll try and creep back or get in touch with her some way?"

He burst out laughing.

"Oh, Morningdew, there's a lot of nice things about you, but one of the nicest is that you never disappoint a fellow. I was wondering if you'd see it. Go back to Mr. Whitney? It'll go back the first thing tomorrow morning and you'll take it."



# CHAPTER V

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

The next morning Babbitts and I started out for the offices of Whitney & Whitney. They're far downtown, near Wall Street, way up in the top of a skyscraper where the air is good even in summer. I'd been in them before, and it was funny as we shot up in the elevator to think of those first visits, when I was so scared of Mr. Whitney—"the chief," as Jack Reddy calls him, and it's his name all right.

We were shown right into his office, like we'd come with a million-dollar lawsuit, and when he saw me he got up and held out his big, white hand.

"Well, well, Molly! How's the smartest girl in New York?" Then he looked from me to Babbitts with a twinkle in his eye. "She's looking fine, my boy. You've taken good care of her." And then back to me, "Treats you well, eh? If he *doesn't*—remember—Whitney & Whitney's services are yours to command."

That's the way he is, always glad to see you, always with his joke. But, there's another side to him—a sort of terrible, fierce quiet—I've seen it and—Gee whiz! If he ever got after me the way I once saw him get after a man he thought was guilty I'd crawl under the table and die right there on the carpet. He isn't a bit good-looking—a big, clumsy sort of man, stoop-shouldered, and with a head of rough gray hair and eyes set deep under bushy brows. When he questions you those eyes look at you kind and pleasant—but, *forget it!* There's not a thing they don't see. *You* think your face is solid flesh and blood. It is to most—but to Mr. Whitney it's no more than a pane of glass.

His son George—he was there and Jack Reddy too—doesn't favor his father. He's an awful stylish chap, with blond hair sleeked down on his skull, and glasses set pert on the bridge of his nose. They say he's smart, but not as big as the old man, and he hasn't got the same genial, easy way. But he's always very cordial to

us, and even if he wasn't his father's son and a close friend of Jack Reddy's, I guess I'd like him anyhow.

They were very interested in what I had to say, but with Mr. Whitney himself you never can guess what he thinks. He sits listening, slouched down in his armchair, with his shirt bosom crumpled, like an old bear ruminating—or hibernating is it?—in a hollow tree. When I was through he stretched out his hand, took a cigar from a box on the table and said:

"Just call up the Azalea Woods Estates, George, and find out how long Miss Whitehall expects to be there." Then as Mr. George left the room he turned to me and said, "Want to make some money?"

I have a lot of money—ten thousand dollars, the reward they gave me after the Hesketh Mystery was solved—so money doesn't cut much ice with me. But doing something for Mr. Whitney does, and I guessed right off he had a little job for Molly Babbitts.

"I want to do whatever Whitney & Whitney asks," I said. "That's a privilege and you don't get paid for privileges."

He burst out laughing and said:

"It's easily seen half of you's Irish, Molly. There is something you can do for me, and whether you want it or not, you'll be paid for your services just as O'Mally, my own detective, is. Here it is. That information you got from your little friend is valuable. As you were sharp enough to see, Barker may try to get in touch with Miss Whitehall. To my mind he'd be more inclined to try her office than her home where there's a mother and a servant to overhear and ask questions. What would you think about going on the switchboard again?"

My old work, the one thing I *could* do!

"Bully!" I cried out, forgetting my language in my excitement.

Mr. Whitney smiled:

"Then we're agreed. As soon as I can arrange matters I'll let you know, probably this afternoon. I don't now know just where we'll put you but I fancy in the Black Eagle's own central. And I don't need to say to both of you that you're to keep as silent as you did in the Hesketh case."

I smiled to myself at that. Mr. Whitney knew, no one better, that when it comes to keeping mum a deaf mute hasn't anything over me.

Just then Mr. George came back. He had got Tony Ford on the wire and heard from him that Miss Whitehall might be in her offices some time yet, as she was trying to sublet them.

Late that afternoon I had my instructions. The next morning I was to go to the Black Eagle Building and begin work as a hello girl. If questioned I was to

answer that all I knew was Miss McCalmont, the old girl, had been transferred and I was temporarily installed in her place. It was my business to listen to every phone message that went into or out from the Azalea Woods Estates. I would be at liberty to give my full attention as almost every office had its own wire. Miss Whitehall had had hers but it had been disconnected since her failure, and she was only accessible through the building's central. The work was so easy it seemed a shame to take the money.

The first two days there was nothing doing and it was desperate dull. The telephone office was off the main hall to one side of the elevator, a bright little place on the street level. A good part of the time I sat at the desk looking out at the people passing like shadows across the ground glass of the windows. There were some calls for Miss Whitehall, all business. These, no matter what they were, I listened to but got nothing. Sometimes she answered, sometimes Tony Ford.

My desk was set so I could see out through the doorway into the hall, and the first morning I was there I saw her pass. She looked better than she had that night in her own apartment, but her face had a grave, worried expression which you couldn't be surprised at, seeing how things stood with her.

It was the second evening and I was thinking of getting ready to go—the building's exchange closed at half-past six—when a tall fellow with a swagger in his walk and his shoulders held back like he thought a lot of his shape, stopped in the doorway and called out:

"Hello, Miss McCalmont. How goes the times?"

I looked up surprised and when he saw it wasn't Miss McCalmont he looked surprised too, raising his eyebrows and opening his eyes with an exaggerated expression like he did it to make you laugh. He was a fine-looking chap if size does it—over six feet and wide across the chest—but his face, broad and flat, with cheeks too large for his features, wasn't the kind I admire. Also I noticed that the good-natured look it had was contradicted by the gray, small eyes, sharp as a gimlet and hard as a nail. I supposed he was some clerk from one of the offices come to ask Miss McCalmont to dinner—they're always doing that—and answered careless, fingering at the plugs:

"Miss McCalmont's been transferred."

"You don't say," says he, leaning easy against the doorpost. "Since when is that?"

"Since I came," I answered.

He grinned, showing teeth as white as split almonds, and his eyes over the grin began to size me up, shrewd and curious. Taking him for some fresh guy that Miss McCalmont was jolly along—they do that too—I paid no attention to him,

humming a tune and looking languid at my finger nails. He wasn't phased a little bit, but making himself comfortable against the doorpost, said:

"Going to stay on here?"

"The central'll give you all the information you want," I answered and wheeling round in my chair looked at the clock. "Ten minutes past six. How slow the time goes when you're dull."

He burst out laughing and he *did* have a jolly, infectious kind of laugh.

"Say," he said, "you're a live one, aren't you?"



*'Say,' he said, 'you're a live one, aren't you?'*

"I wouldn't be long, if I had to listen to all the guys that ain't got anything better to do than block up doorways and try to be fresh."

He laughed louder and lolled up against the woodwork.

"I like you fine," said he. "Are you a permanency or just a fleeting vision?"

"Talking of fleeting visions, ain't it about your dinner hour?"

"You act to me as if this was your first job," was his answer, sort of thoughtful.

Wouldn't it make you smile! It did me—a small quiet smile all to myself. He saw it, dropped his head to one side and said, as smooth and sweet as molasses:

"What do they call you, little one?"

It was all I could do to keep from laughing, but I crumpled up my forehead into a scowl and looked cross at him:

"What my name is you'll never know and what yours is you needn't tell me for I've guessed. I've met members of your tribe before—it's large and prominent—the ancient and honorable order of jackasses."

He made me a low bow.

"So flattered at this speedy recognition," he says, airy and smiling. "You may know the tribe, but not the individual. Permit me to introduce myself—Anthony Ford."

I gave a start and turned it into a stretch. So *this* was the wonderful Tony Ford—a slick customer all right.

"That don't convey anything to my mind," I answered. "A rose by any other name still has its thorns."

"For more data—I'm the managing clerk of the Azalea Woods Estates, see seventeenth floor, first door to your left."

"Ain't I heard you were closed up there?"

"We are. This may be the last time you'll ever see me, so look well at me. Er—what did you say your name was?"

"One of the unemployed!" I said, falling back in my chair and rolling my eyes up at the ceiling. "Hangs round my switchboard and hasn't the price of a dinner in his jeans."

"I was too hasty," said he; "this isn't your first job."

"If your place is shut what are you doing here—not at this present moment, the actions of fools are an old story to me—but in the building?"

"Closing up the business. Did you think I was nosing round for an unlocked door or an open safe? Does this fresh, innocent countenance look like the mug of a burglar?" He grinned and thrusting a hand into his pocket rattled the loose silver there. "Hear that? Has a sound like a dinner, hasn't it?"

*That* made me mad—the vain fool thinking he could flirt with me as he had with Iola. I slanted a side look at him and his broad shining face with the eyes that didn't match it gave me a feeling like I longed to slap it good and hard. Gee, I'd have loved to feel my hand come *whang* up against one of those fat cheeks! But it's the curse of being a perfect lady that you can't hit when you feel like it—except with your tongue.

"I ain't known many burglars," I answered, "but now that I look at you it *does* come over me that you've a family resemblance to those few I've met. Seeing which I'll decline the honor of your invitation. Safety first."

That riled him. He flushed up and a surly look passed over his face making it ugly. Then he shrugged up his shoulders and leaned off the doorpost, giving a hitch to the front of his coat.

"I generally like a dash of tabasco in mine," says he, "but when it comes to the whole bottle spilled in the dish, it's too hot. Just make a note of that against our next meeting. I don't like being disappointed twice. Good evening."

And off he went, swaggering down the hall.

On the way home I wondered what Soapy'd say when I told him, but when he came in Tony Ford went straight out of my head for at last there was exciting news—Barker had been located in Philadelphia.

Two people had seen him there, one a man who knew him well, and saw him the night before in a taxi, the other an Italian who kept a newsstand. That same evening between eight and nine Barker had stopped at the stand and bought several New York papers. The Italian, who was quick-witted, recognized him from his pictures in the papers, and reported to the police.

"He's evidently only going out after dark," said Babbitts. "But a man can't hide for long whose picture's spread broadcast over the country."

"And who's got a face like the American Eagle after it's grown a white mustache," I answered.

That was Thursday night. Friday morning I toddled down to my job, feeling there wasn't much in it and that when I came home I'd hear Barker was landed and it would be domestic life again for little Molly.

The day went by quiet and uneventful as the others had been. I read a novel and sewed at a tray cloth, and now and then jacked in for a call. It was getting on for evening and I was thinking about home and dinner when—Bang! came two calls, one right after the other, that made me feel I was earning my money.

The first was at a quarter to five. Our central came sharp and clear:

"Hello, Gramercy 3503—Long Distance—Philadelphia's calling you."

Philadelphia! Can you see me stiffening up, with my hand ready to raise the cam?

"All right—Gramercy 3503."

I could hear the girls in our central, the wait of hum and broken sounds—how well I knew it!—and then a distant voice, brisk and business-like, "Hello, Philadelphia—Waiting." Then a pause and presently the whispering jar of the wires, "Here's your party. Gramercy 3503, all right for Philadelphia."

Running over those miles and miles the voice—a man's—came clear as a bell.

"I want to speak to the Azalea Woods Estates."

I made the connection, softly lifted the cam, and listened in.

"Is this the office of the Azalea Woods Estates?"

A woman's voice answered, as close as if she was in the next room:

"Yes—who is it?"

"Is Mr. Anthony Ford there?"

"No, Mr. Ford has left my employment. I am Miss Whitehall, my business is closed."

There was a pause. My heart which had hit up a lively gait began to ease down. Only Tony Ford—Pshaw!

"Are you there?" said the woman.

"Yes," came the answer. "Could you give me his address?"

"Certainly. Hold the wire for a moment."

After a wait of a minute or two she was back with the address which she gave him. He repeated it carefully, thanked her and hung up.

Talk of false alarms! I was so disappointed thinking I'd got something for Mr. Whitney, that I sat crumpled up in my chair sulking, and right in the middle of my sulks came the second call.

It was Long Distance again—Toronto.

"I wonder what Toronto wants with her," I thought as I jacked in, and then, leaning my elbow on the desk listened, not much interested. Three sentences hadn't passed before I was as still as a graven image, all my life gone into my ears.

"Is that you, Carol?" I could just hear it, a fine little thread of sound as if it came from a ghost in the other world.

"Yes—who's speaking?"

"It's I—J. W. B."

Barker's initials! My heart gave a leap and then began to fox trot. If I had any doubts, her answer put an end to them. I could hear the gasp in her breath, the fright in her voice.

"You? What are you doing this for?"

"There's no danger. I'm careful. Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, this morning."

"Will you come?"

"Are you sure it's all right? Have you seen the papers here?"

"All of them. Don't be afraid. I'm taking no risks. Are you coming?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I can leave tonight. There's a train at eight."

"Good. I'll meet you and explain everything. Do as I said in the letter. I'll be there."

"Very well—understand. Please ring off. Good-bye."

For a moment I sat thinking. She was going to Toronto to meet Barker by a train that left at eight, and it was now half-past five. There was no use trying to trace the call—I knew enough for that—so I got Mr. Whitney's office and told him, careful, without names. He was awful pleased and handed me out some compliments that gave me the courage to ask for something I was crazy to get—the scoop for Babbitts. It would be a big story—Barker landed through the girl he was in love with. I knew they'd follow her and could Babbitts go along? I don't have to tell you that he agreed, making only one condition—if they were unsuccessful, *silence*. O'Mally, who was up from Philadelphia, would go. Babbitts could join him at the Grand Central Station.

I took a call for the *Dispatch*, found Babbitts and told him enough to send him home on the run—but not much; there's too many phones in those newspaper offices. It was nearly seven when I got there myself, dragged him into our room, and while I packed his grip gave him the last bulletins. He was up in the air. It would be the biggest story that had ever come his way.

I had to go down to the station with him, for neither he nor O'Mally knew her. I was desperate afraid she wouldn't come—get cold feet the way women do when they're eloping. But at a quarter of eight she showed up. She didn't look a bit nervous or rattled, and went about getting her ticket as quiet as if she was going for a week-end to Long Island. O'Mally—he was a fat, red-faced man, looking more like a commercial traveler than a sleuth—was right behind her as she bought it. Then as she walked to the track entrance with her suitcase in her hand, I saw them follow her, lounging along sort of neighborly and casual, till the three of them disappeared under the arch.

It was late before I went to sleep that night. I kept imagining them tracking her through the Toronto Depot, leaping into a taxi that followed close on hers, and going somewhere—but where I couldn't think—to meet Barker. For the first time I began to wonder if any harm could come to Babbitts. In detective stories when they shadowed people there were generally revolvers at the finish. But, after all, Johnston Barker wasn't flying for his life, or flying from jail. As far as I could get it, he was just flying away with the Copper Pool's money. Perhaps that wasn't desperate enough for revolvers.

When I finally did go to sleep I dreamed that all of us, the fat man, Babbitts, Carol Whitehall and I and Mr. Barker, were packed together in one taxi, which



was rushing through the dark, lurching from side to side. As if we weren't enough, it was piled high with suitcases, on one of which I was sitting, squeezed up against Mr. Barker, who had a face like an eagle, and kept telling me to move so he could get his revolver.

I don't know what hour I awoke, but the light was coming in between the curtains and the radiators were beginning to snap with the morning heat when I opened my eyes. I came awake suddenly with that queer sensation you sometimes have that you're not alone.

And I wasn't. There sitting on a chair by the bedside, all hunched up in his overcoat, with his suitcase at his feet, was Himself, looking as cross as a bear.

I sat up with a yelp as if he'd been a burglar.

"You here?" I cried.

He looked at me, glum as an owl, and nodded.

"Yes. It's all right."

"Why—why—what's happened?"

"Nothing."

"You haven't been to Toronto and back in this time?"

"I've been to Rochester and back," he snapped. "She got out there, waited most of this infernal night and took the first return train."

"Came back?"

"Isn't that what I'm saying?" For Himself to speak that way to me showed he was riled something dreadful. "She got off at Rochester and stayed round in the depot—didn't see anyone, or speak to anyone, or send a phone, or a wire. She got a train back at three, we followed her and saw her go up the steps of her own apartment."

"Why—what do you make of it?"

He shrugged:

"Only one of two things. She either changed her mind or saw she was being shadowed."



# CHAPTER VI

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

This chapter in our composite story falls to me, not because I can write it better but because I was present at that strange interview which changed the whole face of the Harland case. Even now I can feel the tightening of the muscles, the horrified chill, as we learned, in one of the most unexpected and startling revelations ever made in a lawyer's office, the true significance of the supposed suicide.

It was the morning after the night ride of Babbitts and O'Mally, and I was late at the office. The matter had been arranged after I left the evening before and I knew nothing of it. As I entered the building I ran into Babbitts, who was going to the Whitney offices to report on his failure and in the hopes that some new lead might have cropped up. Drawing me to the side of the hall he told me of their expedition. I listened with the greatest interest and surprise. It struck me as amazing and rather horrible. Until I heard it I had not believed the story of the typewriter girl—that Barker was in love with Miss Whitehall—but in the face of such evidence I had nothing to say.

We were both so engrossed that neither noticed a woman holding a child by the hand and moving uncertainly about our vicinity. It wasn't till the story was over and we were walking toward the elevator that I was conscious of her, looking this way and that, jostled by the men and evidently scared and bewildered. Judging her too timid to ask her way, and too unused to such surroundings—she looked poor and shabby—to consult the office directory on the wall, I stopped and asked her where she wanted to go.

She gave a start and said with a brogue as rich as butter:

"It's to L'yer Whitney's office I'm bound, but where is it I don't know and it's afeared I am to be demandin' the way with everyone runnin' by me like hares."

"I'm going there myself," I said, "I'll take you."

She bubbled out in relieved thanks and followed us into the elevator. As the car shot up I looked her over wondering what she could want with the chief. She was evidently a working woman, neatly dressed in a dark coat and small black hat under which her hair was drawn back smooth and tight. Her face was of the best Irish type, round, rosy and honest. One of her hands clasped the child's, his little fingers crumpled inside her rough, red ones. She addressed him as "Dannie," and when passengers crowded in and out, drew him up against her, with a curious, soft tenderness that seemed instinctive.

He was a pale, thin little chap, eight or nine, with large, gray eyes, that he'd lift to the faces round him with a solemn, searching look. I smiled down at him but didn't get any response, and it struck me that both of them—woman and boy—were in a state of suppressed nervousness. Every time the gate clanged she'd jump, and once I heard her mutter to him "not to be scared."

Inside the office Babbitts went up the hall to the old man's den and I tried to find out what she wanted. Her nervousness was then obvious. Shifting from foot to foot, her free hand—she kept a tight clutch on the boy—fingering at the buttons of her coat, she refused to say. All I could get out of her was that she had something important to tell and she wouldn't tell it to anyone but "L'yer Whitney."

By this time my curiosity was aroused. I asked her if she was a witness in a case, and with a troubled look she said "maybe she was," and then, backing away from me against the wall, reiterated with stubborn determination, "But I won't speak to no one but L'yer Whitney himself."

I went up to the private office where the old man and George were talking with Babbitts and told them. George was sent to see if he could manage better than I had and presently was back again with the announcement:

"I can't get a thing out of her. She insists on seeing you, father, and says she won't go till she does."

"Bring her in," growled the chief, and as George disappeared he turned to Babbitts and said, "Wait here for a moment. I want to ask you a few more things about that girl last night."

Babbitts drew back to the window and I, taking a chair by the table, said, laughing:

"She's probably been sued by her landlord and wants you to take the case."

"Maybe," said the old man quietly. "I'm curious to see."

Just then the woman came in, the child beside her, and George following. She looked at the chief with a steady, inquiring gaze, and he rose, as urbanely welcoming as if she were a star client.

"You want to see me, Madam?"

"I do," she answered, "if you're L'yer Whitney. For it's to no one else I'll be goin' with what I'm bringin'."

He assured her she'd found the right man, and waved her to a chair. She sat down, drawing the boy against her knee, the chief opposite, leaning a little forward in his chair, all encouraging attention.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

"It's about the Harland suicide," she answered, "and it's my husband, Dan Meagher, who drives a dray for the Panama Fruit Company, who's sent me here. 'Go to L'yer Whitney and tell him,' he says to me, 'and don't be sayin' a word to a soul, not your own mother if she was above the sod to hear ye.'"

George, who had been standing by the table with the sardonic smile he affects, suddenly became grave and dropped into a chair. The chief, nodding pleasantly, said:

"The Harland suicide, Mrs. Meagher; that's very good. We'd like any information you can give us about it."

The woman fetched up a breath so deep it was almost a gasp. With her eyes on the old man she bent forward, her words, with their rich rolling r's, singularly impressive.

"It's an honest woman I am, your Honor, and what I'll be after tellin' you is God's truth for me and for Dannie here, who's never lied since the day he was born."

The little boy looked up and spoke, his voice clear and piping, after the fuller tones of his mother:

"I'm not lying."

"Let's hear this straight, Mrs. Meagher," said the chief. "I'm a little confused. Is it you or the boy here that knows something?"

"*Him*," she said, putting her hand on the child's shoulder, "he *seen something*. It's this way, your Honor. I'm one of the cleaners in the Massasoit Building. The three top floors is mine and I go on duty to rid up the offices from five till eight. It's my habit to take Dannie with me, he bein', as maybe you can see, delicate since he had the typhoid, and not allowed to go to school yet or run on the street."

"I empty the trash baskets," piped up the little boy.

"Don't speak, Dannie, till your evidence is wanted," said she. "On the evenin' of the suicide, L'yer Whitney, I was doin' my chores on the seventeenth floor, in the Macauley-Blake Company's offices, they bein', as you may know, at the back of the buildin'. I was through with the outer room by a quarter past six, so I turned off the lights and went into the inner room, closin' the door, as I had the window

open and didn't want the cold air on the boy."

"You left him in the room that looks over the houses to the front of the Black Eagle Building?"

"By the window," spoke up the little boy. "I was leanin' there lookin' out."

"That's it," said she. "The office was dark and as I shut the door I seen him, by the sill, peerin' over some books they had there." She took the little boy's hand and, fondling it in hers, said, "Now, Dannie, tell his Honor what you saw, same as you tolt Paw and me this day." She turned to the chief. "It's no lie he'll be after sayin', L'yer Whitney, I'll swear that on the Book."

The little boy raised his big eyes to the old man's and spoke, clearly and slowly:

"I was lookin' acrost at the Black Eagle Building, at the windows opposite. On the floor right level with me they was all dark, 'cept the hall one. That was lit and I could see down into the hall, and there was no one in it. Sudden a door opened, the one nearest to the window, and a head come out and looked quick up and down and then acrost to our building. Then it went in and I was thinkin' how it couldn't see me because it was all dark where I was, when the door opened again, slow, and an awful sort of thing came out."

He stopped and turned to his mother, shrinking and scared. She put her arm round him and coaxed softly:

"Don't be afeart, darlint. Go on, now, and tell it like you tolt it to me and Paw at breakfast."

The old man was motionless, his face as void of expression as a stone mask. George was leaning forward, his elbows on the table, his eyes on the boy in a fixed stare.

"What was it you saw, Dannie?" said the chief, his voice sounding deep as an organ after that moment of breathless hush. "Don't be afraid to tell us."

The boy spoke again, pressing back against his mother:

"It was like an animal creepin' along, crouched down——"

"Show the gentlemen," said Mrs. Meagher, and without more urging the little chap slid down to the floor on his hands and knees and began padding about, bent as low as he could. It was a queer sight, believe me—the tiny figure creeping stealthily along the carpet—and we four men, all but the old man, now up on our feet, leaning forward to watch with faces of amazement.

"That way," he said, looking up sideways. "Just like that—awful quick from the door to the window." He rose and went back to his mother, cowering against her. "I thought it was some kind of bear, and I was terrible scairt. I was so scairt I couldn't raise a yell or make a break or nothin'. I stood lookin' and I saw it was a

man, and—" He stopped, terrified memory halting the words.

She had to coax again, her arm around him, her face close to his.

"Go on, Dannie boy, you want the gintlemin to think you're the brave man that ye are. Go on, now, lamb." Over his head she looked at the chief and said, "It's a sight might have froze the heart of anyone, let alone a pore, sickly kid."

The boy went on, almost in a whisper:

"He had another man on his back, still, like he was dead, with his arms hangin' down. I could see the hands draggin' along the floor like they was bits of rope. And when he got to the window, quick—I never seen nothin' so quick—the one that was creepin' slid the other on to the sill. He done it this way." He crouched down on his knees with his hands raised over his head and made a forward, shoving motion. "Pushing him out. Just for a second I could see the dead one, acrost the sill, with his head down, and then the other gave a big shove and he went over."

There was a moment of dead silence in which you could hear the tick of the clock on the mantel. I had an impression of Babbitts, his face full of horror, and George, bent across the table, biting on his under lip. Only the old man held his pose of bland stolidity.

"And what did the man—the one that was on his knees—do then, Dannie?" he asked gently.

"He got up and made a break for the door. Whisht," he shot one palm across the other with a swift gesture—"like that, and went in."

"Which door was that—which side?"

Dannie waved his right hand.

"This one—the door he came out of—this side!"

"The Azalea Woods Estates," came from George.

The old man gave him a quick glance, a razor-sharp reproof, and turning to Dannie held out his hand.

"Well, Dannie, that's a wonderful story, and it's great the way you tell it. Let's shake on it." The little boy stepped forward and put his small, thin paw in the chief's big palm. "You've told it to all the fellows on the block, haven't you?"

Dannie shook his head.

"I ain't told it to a soul till this mornin', when I couldn't hold it no more and let out to Paw and Maw."

"Why didn't you tell?"

"I was scairt. I didn't want to. I kep' dreamin' of it at night and I didn't know what to do. And this mornin' when Paw and Maw was gassin' about the suicide I just busted out. I—I—" his lips trembled and the tears welled into his eyes.

"It's thrue what he says, every word," said Mrs. Meagher. "It's sick he's been ever sence, and me crazy not knowin' what was eatin' into him. And this mornin' he breaks into a holler and out it comes."

As she was speaking the old man patted the thin hand, eyeing the child with a deep, quiet kindness.

"You're a wise boy, Dannie," said he. "And you want to keep on being a wise boy and not tell anyone. Will you answer a question or two, saying when you don't know or don't remember? I'll see that you get something pretty nice afterward, if you do."

"Yes," says Dannie, "I'll answer."

"Could you see what the man looked like, the man that was alive?"

"No—I wasn't near enough. They was like—like"—he paused and then said, his eyes showing a troubled bewilderment—"like shadows."

"He would have seen the figures in silhouette," George explained, "black against the lit window."

"That's it," he turned eagerly to George. "And it was acrost the street and the houses on Broadway."

"Um," said the chief, "too far for any detail. Well, this man, the one that went on his hands and knees, was he a fat man?"

The child shook his head.

"No, sir. He—he was just like lots of men."

"Now look over these three gentlemen," said the chief, waving his hand at us. "Which of them looks most like him? Not their faces, but their bodies."

Dannie looked at us critically and carefully. His eye passed quickly over Babbitts, medium height, broad and stocky, lingered on me, six feet two with the longest reach in my class at Harvard, then brought up on George, who tips the beam at one hundred and sixty pounds.

"Most like him," he said, pointing a little finger at the junior member of Whitney & Whitney. "Skinny like him."

"Very well done, Dannie," said the old man, then turned to George. "Lightly built. He would have no means of judging height."

George took up the interrogation:

"Could you see at all what kind of clothes he wore?"

"No—he went too quick."

"And he looked over at your building?"

"Yes—but he couldn't have seen anything. Maw's floors was all dark."

"Did you see him come out of the room again?"

"No. I was that scairt I crep' away back to where Maw was."



"Come in to me like a specter," said Mrs. Meagher. "And not a word out of him only that he was cold."

"Well, Mrs. Meagher," said the chief, "this is a great service you've done us, and it's up to us to do something for you."

"Oh, your Honor," she answered, "it's not pay I'm wantin'. It was my dooty and I done it. Now, Dannie boy, it's time we was gettin' home."

"Wait a moment," said the old man. "You say your husband's a drayman. Tell him to come and see me—my home's the best place—this evening if possible. And tell him—and this applies as much to you"—his bushy brows came down over his eyes and his expression grew lowering—"not to mention one word of this. If you keep your mouths shut, your future's made. If you blab"—he raised a warning finger and shook it fiercely in her face—"God help you."

Mrs. Meagher looked terrified. She clutched Dannie and drew him against her skirts.

"It's not a word I'll be after sayin', your Honor," she faltered. "I'll swear it before the priest."

"That's right. I'll see the priest about it." He suddenly changed, straightened up, and was the genial old gentleman who could put the shyest witness at his ease. "The little chap doesn't look strong. New York's no place for him. He ought to run wild in the country for a bit."

"Ah, don't be after sayin' it," she shook her head wistfully. "That's what the doctor tolt me. But what can a poor scrubwoman do?"

"Not as much, maybe, as a lawyer can. You leave that to me. I'll see he goes and you'll be along. All I ask in return is"—he put his finger on his lips—"just one word—silence."

She tried to say something, but laughing and pooh-poohing her attempts at thanks, he walked her to the door.

"There—there—no back-talk. Hustle along now, and don't forget, I want to see Dan Meagher tonight. Ask the clerk in the waiting room for the address. Good-bye." He shook hands with her and patted Dannie on the shoulder. "A month on a farm and you won't know this boy. Good-bye and good luck to you!"

As the door shut on her his whole expression and manner changed. He turned back to the room, his hands deep in his pockets, his shoulders hunched, his eyes, under the drooping thatch of his hair, looking from one to the other of us.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

"*Murder!*" came from George on a rising breath.

"Murder," repeated his father. "A fact that I've suspected since the inquest."



# CHAPTER VII

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

*Murder!* Will I ever forget that night when Babbitts told me, the two of us shut in our room! I can see his face now, thrust out toward me, all strained and staring, his voice almost a whisper. As for me—I guess I looked like the Village Idiot, with my mouth dropped open and my eyes bulged so you could cut 'em off with a shingle.

The next day the same word went out to us that was given to Mrs. Meagher—*silence*. Not a whisper, not a breath! Neither the public, nor the press, nor the police must get an inkling. All there was to go upon was the story of a child, and until this could be confirmed by other facts, the outside world was to know nothing. *If* corroborative evidence were found it would be the biggest sensation the Whitney office had ever had. Babbitts was promised the scoop, but if he gave away a thing before the time was ripe it would be the end of us as far as Whitney & Whitney went.

Six shared the secret, the Whitneys, father and son, the Babbittses, husband and wife, Jack Reddy and O'Mally. In twenty-four hours Mrs. Meagher and Dannie were spirited off to a farm up-state and the old man had a séance with Meagher, the drayman, that shut his mouth tighter than a gag.

The six of us were organized into a sort of band to work on the case. It seemed to me we were like moles, tunneling along underground, not a soul on the surface knowing we were there, and if they'd found it out, not able to make a guess what we were after.

O'Mally and I were the only two that were put right on the scene of the crime. I was to stay on the Black Eagle switchboard to pick up all I could from Troop, the boy who operated the one elevator which was running that night—to

find out about the people he had taken up or down from the seventeenth floor between five and six-thirty. O'Mally was commissioned to examine the Azalea Woods Estates offices, and get next to Mrs. Hansen, cleaner of the top floors, and see if she had seen anything on the evening of January fifteenth.

What we ferreted out I'll put down as clearly and quickly as I can. It may not be interesting, but to understand a case that *was* interesting, it's necessary to know it.

O'Mally got busy right off—quicker than I, but he knew better how to do it. The Azalea Woods Estates was vacated and *that* was easy. His search only gave up one thing, two dark spots on the floor of the private office close by the window. With a chisel he shaved off the wood on which they were and it was sent to a chemist who analyzed the spots as blood.

What he heard from Mrs. Hansen was even more important, and he did it well, worming it out of her in easy talk about the suicide. I'll boil it down to simple facts, not as I heard him tell it in Mr. Whitney's den, with bits about Mrs. Hansen that you couldn't help but laugh at.

On the night of January the fifteenth she was at work on the seventeenth floor at half-past five. Behind the elevators, round on the side corridor where the service stairs go down, is a sink closet where the cleaners kept their brooms and dusters. Having finished with a rear office she went into this closet to empty and refill her pails, at a little before six. While in there she could hear nothing because of the running water, but when she turned it off she heard steps coming down the stairs on the Broadway side. She had moved out into the hall when the steps stopped, and rounding the corner by the elevators she saw Mr. Harland standing at the door of the Azalea Woods Estates offices.

He was in profile and didn't see her, and didn't hear her, she said, because she wore old soft shoes that made no sound. Just as she caught sight of him she remembered she'd left her duster in the sink closet and went back for it. When she returned to the main corridor he was gone, and she went into the Hudson Electrical Company's offices, staying there till six-twenty—she noted the time by a nickel clock on one of the desks. She decided to do the Azalea Woods Estates rooms next but on trying the door found it was locked. This didn't bother her, as she had found it so once or twice before during the past month. She then went down the hall into a rear suite in which she was shut when the suicide occurred.

This fixed the fact that Harland had gone straight from his own office, down the stairs on the Broadway side, into the Azalea Woods Estates, and that he or somebody in there had locked the door.

Who had let him in? What man had access to these offices? Can you see me as I sat listening to O'Mally and thinking of the fresh guy who'd wanted to take me out to dinner? Lord, I felt queer!

And I felt queerer, considerable queerer, when the day after that I got hold of Troop—and information. Wait till I tell you.

Mr. Whitney had told me to take my time, there was no rush, and above all things not to raise the ghost of a suspicion in Troop's mind. So I went about it very foxy, lying low in my little den behind the elevators. But when I'd see Troop, lounging in the door of his car, I'd flash a smile at him and get a good-natured grin back.

The evening after O'Mally'd brought in his stuff I thought the time was ready to gather in mine. So after I'd put on my hat and coat I stood loitering by the desk, keeping one eye on the door. Troop came off duty at half-past six, and regular, a few minutes after that, I'd see him sprinting down the hall for the main entrance.

As he came in sight I took up my purse, and he, looking in as I knew he would, caught me just right. There I was staring distracted into it and scrabbling round in the inside, pulling out handkerchiefs and samples and buttons and latchkeys.

"Hello," says he, drawing up, "you look like you'd lost something."

"Oh, Mr. Troop," I answered, "how fortunate you happened along! I *have* lost something, my carfare. And I ain't got another cent but a ten-dollar bill. Will you come across with a nickel till tomorrow?"

"Sure I will, and more too! Which way do you go?"

"Uptown," said I. Neither he nor anyone else in the building knew where I lived or who I was. Miss Morgenthau, temporarily in charge, was all they had on me.

"That's my direction—One Hundred and Fifty-ninth Street, subway."

Now I didn't see myself sleuthing as I hung from a strap in the sub. But in this world you got to grab your chance when it comes, so, "The subway for mine," I said, speaking in a cheerful, unmarried voice, and out we trotted into the street.

It was the thick of the rush hours and we were in the thick of the rush. Like we were leaves on a raging torrent we were whirled through the gate, swept on to the platform and carried into the car. Then the conductor came and pressed on us, leaned and squeezed, and when he'd mashed us in, slid the door shut for fear we'd burst out and flood the platform.

Troop got hold of a strap and I got hold of Troop, and, dangling together like a pair of chickens hung up to grow tender, I opened on the familiar subject of the Harland suicide. It wasn't as hard as I thought, for what with people clawing

their way out and prying their way in, questions and answers were bound to be straight, with no trimmings.

"Where were you when it happened?" I said, getting a jiu-jitsu grip on the front of his coat.

"In the car, halfway down. Didn't know a thing till I got to the ground floor and saw the stampede."

"What did you do?"

"Ran for the street—forgot my job, forgot there was only one car running, forgot everything and made a break. Every passenger did the same—seized us all same as a panic, all racin' and hollerin'. I was right behind Mr. Ford."

It was sooner than I'd expected. The jump I gave was lost in that crush, just as the look that started out on my face wouldn't be noticed, or, if it was, be set down to a stamp on my toe.

"Was he in the car with you?"

"Yes, I'd just gone up to the seventeenth floor for him. Here, you want to get a firm holt on me or you'll be swep' away."

"I'm holding," I gasped, and believe me I was, for a line of people coming out like a bit of the Johnstown Flood was like to tear me loose from my moorings. "Then he must have been in the elevator when Harland jumped?"

"That's it. It was his ring brought me up to the seventeenth floor. He got in and it was while we was goin' down the body fell. Struck the street a few minutes before we reached the bottom."

We were whizzing through the blackness of the tunnel to Times Square. The overflow that had drained off at Forty-second Street had loosened things up a little. I unwrapped myself from around Troop, taking hold of the strap over his hand, and pigeonholing what he'd said. In that boiling pack of people I was cold and shivery down the spine.

"Did Mr. Ford run out in the street like the rest?"

"*Did* he? He done a Marathon! I couldn't make a dint on the crowd, but he shoved through, and when he come back he was all broke up. 'What do you make of that?' says he. 'There's a man committed suicide and they say it's Rollings Harland.'"

"Broke up! I shouldn't wonder. He was in the office late wasn't he—till half-past six?"

"He was *that* night, and he *had* been once or twice before this last month. Told me he was working overtime, though if you'd asked *me* I'd have said he wasn't the kind to do more than his salary called for."

"No," I said, thinking hard underneath. "Seems sort of loaferish."

"Well, I wouldn't say that, but easy, good-humored—you know the sort. But lately he's been on the job, busy, I guess, gettin' ready for the collapse. The night of the suicide he left early, soon after Miss Barry. And a little after six—ten or fifteen minutes maybe—he come bustling back sayin' he'd forgotten some papers and for me to shoot him up quick."

We slowed up for Sixty-ninth Street and two girls in the middle of the car began a football rush for the door. It was a good excuse to be quiet, to get it straight in my head: Ford left early, came back, went into the office after Harland, left probably three or four minutes before the body was flung from the window. This is the way I was thinking while we hung easy from our strap, swinging out sideways like the woman in "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight," clinging to the tongue of the bell.

"Now that was real conscientious of him," I said, suspended over a large fat man and crushing down the paper he was trying to read, "coming back for papers he'd forgotten."

"It sure was," answered Troop. "Many a man would have let them wait."

The fat man dropped the paper and raised his eyes to me with a look like he was determined to be patient—but *why* did I do it?

"Pardon me, sir," says I, "but it's not me that's spoiling your homeward journey, it's the congested condition of the Empire City." And then to Troop, pleasant and regretful, "Dear, dear, that's a lesson not to pass judgment on your fellow creatures. He must have a strong sense of duty. I suppose you waited for him?"

"Not me," said Troop. "That's the time I'm on the jump with all the offices emptying, and especially that night with the other elevator out of commission. Besides it wouldn't have been no use, for he was in there quite a while. It wasn't till nearly half-past six he rang for the car."

"Pity he didn't wait a few minutes longer. Maybe if Mr. Harland had seen him he'd have given up the idea of suicide."

"I've thought of that myself, for accordin' to the inquest, Harland was round that corridor for a half-hour, like as not pacin' up and down while Ford was sittin' in the office near by. Strange, ain't it, the way things happen in this world?"

It was—a great deal stranger than he thought.

For a moment I didn't say anything. I was kind of quivering in my insides with the excitement of it. O'Mally hadn't got anything to beat *this*. We swung lazily back and forth, my hand clasped below Troop's, and the fat man giving up in despair. Only when my wrist bag caught him on the hat, he gave me one reproachful look and then settled the hat hard on his head to show me what he was suffering.

The train began to slow up, white-tiled walls glided past the windows, and the conductor opened the door and yelled, "Ninety-sixth Street."

It had worked out just right. I had my information and here was where I got off. I thanked Troop for the ride I'd had off him, told him I'd give him his nickel tomorrow, and forging to the door like the *Oregon* going round Cape Horn, scrambled out.

Himself wasn't at home to tell things to—it was one of his late nights—so I took a call for Mr. Whitney's house and told him I'd got the stuff for him—*real* stuff. He said to come down that evening at half-past eight, they'd all be there. And after a glass of milk and a soda cracker—I hadn't time or appetite for more—out I lit, as excited as if I was going to a six-reel movie.

I was late and ran panting up the steps of the big, grand house in the West Fifties. I'd been there before, and as I stood waiting in the vestibule I couldn't but smile thinking of that other time when I was so scared, and Himself—he was "Mr. Babbitts" then—had had to jolly me up. He didn't know me as well then as he does now, bless his dear, faithful heart!

The unnatural solemn butler wasn't on the job tonight. Mr. George opened the door for me and showed me into that same room off the hall, with the gold-mounted furniture and the pale-colored rugs and the lights in crystal bunches along the walls. A fire was burning in the grate, its red reflection leaping along the uncovered spaces of floor, polished and smooth as ice. On a center table, all gilt and glass, was a common student lamp, looking cheap and mean in that quiet, rich, glittering room, and beside it were some sheets of paper and several pencils. Old Mr. Whitney and George were there, also Jack Reddy, but O'Mally hadn't come yet.

I told them what Troop had said and they listened as silent as the grave, not batting an eye while I spoke. You didn't have to guess at what they thought. It was in the air. The first real move had been made.

When I finished, Mr. George, who had been making notes on one of the bits of paper, threw down his pencil, and gave a long, soft whistle. The old man, sitting by the fire looking into it, his hands clasped loosely together, the fingers moving round each other—which was a way he had when he was thinking—said very quiet:

"Thank you, Molly—you've done well."

"This puts Ford in the center of the stage," said Mr. George, then turning to his father, "Pretty conclusive, eh, Governor?"

The old man grunted without looking up, his face in the firelight, heavy and brooding.



Jack rose and leaning over Mr. George's shoulder looked at the scribbled notes:

"Left soon after the Barry girl, came back about 6.15 and went to the Azalea Woods Estates offices. That would have been about fifteen to twenty minutes after Harland. Came out about half-past six and was in the elevator when the body fell."

"Positive proof that he was in the rooms with Harland," said Mr. George, "and equally positive proof he was not the man seen by the Meagher child."

"Evidently two men," said Jack.

"Two men," echoed Mr. George. Then turned to me, "Where was Miss Whitehall? Did this Troop fellow say anything about when *she* left?"

Jack looked up from the notes and cast a quick, sharp glance at me.

"She'd gone already, of course?" he said.

"Yes, she'd gone," I answered. "Anyway, Iola Barry said she always went before six." Then in answer to Mr. George, "I didn't ask Troop anything about her. I didn't think there was any need and I was afraid I'd get him curious if I wanted to know too much."

"Good girl," came from the old man in a rumbling growl.

At that moment there was a ring at the bell. With an exclamation of "O'Mally," Mr. George jumped up and went into the hall. It was O'Mally, red as a lobster, and with an important roll to his walk. He stood in the door and looked at the old man in a triumphant way till you'd suppose he'd got the murderer outside chained to the door handle. Babbitts, who'd come to know him well on the trip to Rochester, said he was a first-rate chap and as sharp as a needle, if you could get over his taking himself so dead serious.

When he heard my story some of the starch was taken out of him, but I will say he was so interested that, after the first shock, he forgot to be jealous and was as keen as mustard.

"Two men sure enough," he agreed. "And two men who operated together, one of them in that back room."

"How do you make that out?" asked Jack.

"I'll show you—I've been busy this afternoon." He looked round, selected a gold-legged chair and pulling it to the table, sat down, and taking a fountain pen from his pocket, drew a sheet of paper toward him. "Right next to the church, as you may remember, there are three houses, dwellings. The one nearest the church is occupied by a private party, the two beyond have been thrown together and are run as a boarding house. The last of the two has a rear extension built out to the end of the lot. The day we examined the Azalea Woods Estates I saw that the windows of that extension commanded the side wall of the Black Eagle Building.

"This afternoon I went to the boarding house, said I was a writer looking for a quiet place to work, and asked if they had an empty room in the extension. They had one, not yet vacated, but to be in February. It was occupied by an old lady—Miss Darnley—who being there gave me permission to see it.

"Now here's where I get busy," he drew the paper toward him and began marking it with long straight lines and little squares. "Miss Darnley is a nice old lady and some talker. We got gassing, as natural as could be, on the horrible suicide of Mr. Harland, so close by. She took me to the window and showed me where his offices were, and told me how it was her habit, every evening as night fell, to sit in that window and watch the lights start out, especially in the Black Eagle Building. She sat there always till half-past six, when the first gong sounded for dinner. And if I took the room I was to be sure and go down then—the food was better—she always did.

"By a little skillful jollyng—mostly surprise at her powers of observation and memory—I got from her some significant facts about the lights on the seventeenth floor of the Black Eagle Building on the night of January fifteenth. The Harland suite—she'd located it from the papers—was lit till she went down to dinner. Wonderful how she'd remembered! How was the floor below—bet a hat she couldn't remember *that!* She could, and proud as a peacock, gave a demonstration. All dark as it usually was at six, then a light in the fourth window—Azalea Woods Estates, private office. Then that goes out and the three front windows are bright. Just before she goes down to dinner, she notices that every window on the whole sweep of the seventeenth floor is dark except that fourth one—Azalea Woods Estates, private office."

He stopped and pushed the paper he'd been drawing on across to George.

"Here it is, with the time as I make it marked on each window."

Jack and Mr. George leaned down studying the diagram and Mr. Whitney slowly rose and coming up behind them looked at it over their shoulders. All their faces, clear in the lamplight, with O'Mally's red and proud glancing sideways at the drawing, were intent and frowning.

"Let's see how the thing works out," said Mr. George, taking up a pencil and pulling a sheet of paper toward him. Mr. Whitney straightened up with a sort of tired snort and slouched back to his seat by the fire. Mr. George began, figuring on the paper:

"The Azalea Woods Estates were cleared at six—all lights out. At a few minutes after, Harland came down the stairs and entered them, going through to the private office and switching on the light, or meeting someone there who switched it on as he came. Some ten or fifteen minutes later Ford came in. That's

evidently the moment, according to your old lady, when the private office was dark and the other two lit up. Just before 6:30—time when Ford left—the front rooms are all dark again. Good deal of a mess to me." He tilted back in his chair so that he could see his father. "What do you make of it, Governor?"

"Let's hear what O'Mally has to say first," said Mr. Whitney. They couldn't see his face which was turned to the fire, but I could, and it had a slight, amused smile on it.

O'Mally sprawled back in his chair with his chest thrown out:

"Well, I don't like to commit myself so early in the game, but there are a few things that seem pretty clear. Though the Azalea Woods Estates were dark when Harland came down somebody was there."

"Who?" asked Jack.

O'Mally looked sort of pitying at him:

"His murderer. This man didn't attempt the job alone. Must have held Harland in talk in the private office till later when Tony Ford came in and helped, if he didn't do the actual killing. When *that* was over Ford went, leaving the other man to carry out the sensational denouement."

"What could have been Ford's motive?" said Mr. George. "Did he know Harland?"

O'Mally grinned.

"Oh, we'll find a motive all right. Wait till we've turned up the earth in his tracks. Wait a few days."

"This 'other man,' O'Mally," said Mr. Whitney, "have you any ideas about him?"

"There you got me stumped," said the detective. "Of course we don't know Harland's inner life—had he an enemy and if so who? But—" he paused and let his glance move over the faces of the two young men. "If the thing hadn't been physically impossible I'd have turned my searchlight eye on Johnston Barker."

"Barker!" exclaimed Mr. George. "But Barker was——"

O'Mally interrupted him with a wave of his hand—

"I *said* it was physically impossible."

The old man got up, shaking himself like a big, drowsy animal and came forward into the lamplight.

"Nevertheless, gentlemen," he said quietly, "I'm convinced that it *was* Johnston Barker."

They all gaped at him. I think for the first moment they thought he had some information they hadn't heard and waited open-mouthed for him to give it to them. But he stood there, smiling a little, his eyes moving from one to the

other, sort of quizzical as if their surprise tickled him.

"Now, father," said Mr. George, "what's the sense of saying that when we know that Barker was on the floor above, unable to get out without being seen?"

"I know, George, I know," said his father mildly. "I'm perfectly willing to admit it. But in that room—on the floor above—there had been a quarrel between the two men. Since the disappearance of Barker there's been a good deal of speculation as to the nature of that quarrel. That is, the public has speculated; *I* have felt sure. After the disappearance that quarrel, as far as I could see, had only one interpretation—the lawyer had discovered the perfidy of his associate and threatened exposure. And we all know that the only silent man is a dead man."

"That's all very well," said O'Mally, "but it doesn't get round the fact that Barker couldn't possibly have been there to instigate a murder, or help in murder or commit a murder himself."

"Quite true," said the old man, "as far as we know at present, but you see we know very little. We can speak with more authority when we've made a second examination of the Whitehall offices and a first one of the Harland suite. That's up to you, O'Mally, as soon as you can manage it. There's another important matter but I can't see my way clear to getting it just yet—Ford's own explanation of his movements that evening. I'm curious to hear what he has to say. But that'll have to wait till——"

He paused and Mr. George cut in:

"We land him in jail which I hope will be soon."

"Presently, presently," said his father, turning to the fire. "And now, gentlemen, I think we'll end this little séance. Just look out, George, and see if the limousine's there for Molly."

It was, and they all drifted out, talking as they went, making the date and arranging the plan for the examination of the two offices.

I'd said good-bye to the old man and was following them into the hall, when he caught me by the arm and drawing me back from the door said very low:

"You'll be on duty at the Black Eagle Building for a few days more. Try and get Troop again and ask him what time Miss Whitehall left that night. Don't say a word of what he tells you to anyone, but as soon as you get it let me know."

# CHAPTER VIII

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

For the next few days my moling was stopped—Troop was down with grippe and a substitute in his place. There was nothing to do but sit in my little hole by the elevators, passing the time with a novel and the tray cloth I was embroidering. At night, when Himself and I'd meet up, I'd hear from him how O'Mally was getting on in *his* tunnel. Babbitts kept in close touch with him, for he had the promise of being along when they made the inspection of the offices.

It took some days to arrange for that and while O'Mally was laying his wires for a midnight search, his men were tracking back over Tony Ford's trail. It didn't take them long and there was nothing much brought to light when you considered the kind of a man Tony Ford must be.

For the last three years he'd held clerkships in New York and Albany and once, for six months in Detroit. From some he'd resigned, from others been fired, not for anything bad, but because he was slack and lazy, though bright enough. The only thing they turned up that was shady was over two years before in Syracuse, when he'd been in a small real estate business with a partner and was said to have absconded with some of the funds. Nobody knew much of this and the man he'd been in with couldn't be found. The detectives said it was so vague they didn't put much reliance in it, thought maybe it might be spite work.

Anyway, it wasn't the record of a desperado, and they'd have been sort of baffled to fit his past actions with his present, if it hadn't been for one thing that, according to their experience, was very significant. In the last two months he'd spent a lot more money than his salary. As Miss Whitehall's managing clerk he had been paid sixty-five dollars a week, and he had been living at the rate of a man who has hundreds. It wasn't in his place—that was simple enough—a back

room in a lodging house—but he'd been a spender in the white lights of Broadway. At expensive restaurants and lobster palaces he'd become a familiar figure, the gambling houses knew him, and he'd ridden round in motors like a capitalist.

"By the swath he's been cutting," said Babbitts, "you'd suppose he had an income in five figures."

"O Soapy," I said horrified. "They don't think he was *paid* for it?"

Himself looked solemn at me and nodded:

"That's exactly what they *do* think, Morningdew. He was paid and evidently paid high. Whoever the 'Other Man' was he could afford to be extravagant in his accomplice. Their idea is that Ford was engaged for his superior strength, and demanded a big retainer in advance."

"What a terrible man," I murmured and thought of him standing in the doorway smiling at me like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. "He's a regular gunman."

"Worse than a gunman, for he's educated," said Babbitts. "Gee, wasn't it a lucky thing Iola got out of that place!"

The morning after that conversation I bid Babbitts good-bye as if he was going to the South Pole, for that was the night they'd selected to examine the two offices. Three of them were in it, O'Mally, Babbitts, and one of O'Mally's men, a chap called Stevens. Himself would turn up for breakfast if he could, but if there was anything pressing at the paper or more developed than they expected, I wasn't to look for him till the evening of the next day.

I went down to my work and had a dull time for Troop was still sick and there was nothing to do but now and then jack in for a call and sew on my tray cloth. No Babbitts that night and no Babbitts for breakfast, and me piling down town for another eight hours in that dreary room with Troop not yet back and not a soul to speak to.

If, when I came home that evening, I'd found Babbitts still away I believe I'd have forgotten I was a lady sleuth and started a general alarm for him. But thank goodness, I didn't need to. For there he was on the Davenport with his muddy boots on the best plush cushion, sound asleep.

I didn't intend to wake him, but creeping round to our room, looking at him as I crept, I ran into the Victrola with a crash, and up he sat, wide awake, thanking me sarcastic for having roused him in such a delicate, tactful manner.

In a minute I was sitting on the edge of the Davenport—you'll know how I felt when I tell you I forgot his feet on the cushion—squeezed up against him and staring into his face:

"Quick—go ahead! Did you find anything?"

"We did, Morningdew."

"Did you get any nearer who the other man is?"

"We got next. The chief was right. It's Johnston Barker!"

"*Barker!* But, Soapy——"

He raised a finger and pointed in my face:

"Don't begin with any buts till you know. Now if you'll be quiet and listen like a nice little girl, you'll see."

This is what he told me as I sat pressed up against him, every now and then giving myself a hitch to keep from sliding off, too eager listening to rise up and get a chair.

They gained access to both offices without any trouble, O'Mally flashing his badge at the nightman, whom he'd already seen and fixed with a story that he was after important papers for the Copper Pool men. They tried the Harland offices first, a cursory inspection showing nothing. It wasn't till O'Mally himself got busy in the rear room that they began to move forward. A mark on the window sill was what started him. It was a circular scrape about as big round as a butter plate and was made, he said, by the heel of a man's boot.

Then he turned his attention to the window casing, the ledge and the outside frame. He used a small pocket searchlight, also matches, dropping them as they burned down and examining every inch of the surface. The first thing he lit upon was the cleat to which the awning rope is fastened in summer. It is always screwed securely down to the woodwork, and has to be strong and firm to hold the awnings in heavy winds, especially at that height. The cleat outside the window was loosened, and between its base and the wood were a few torn threads of rope that had caught in the head of the upper screw. These threads, carefully untangled and preserved, were from a new rope, clean and yellow, not the gray wind and weather-worn shreds that would have been left from the summer. Below the cleat were scratches, some long and deep, some wide, zigzag scrapes. By the color of these he said they had been recently made.

From there they descended to the Whitehall suite. Here O'Mally wasted little time on the front rooms but went direct to the rear office and began on the window. Babbitts and Stevens were ordered to search the floors and walls, which was easy as the furniture was gone and the place was bare except for the radiator and the washstand. I may as well put here that their investigations produced nothing.

But O'Mally's did. He went to work just as he had on the floor above. This cleat was secure, but on the sill were more scratches, several long deep ones, and on the stone ledge that same round, circular mark. But what he found there that was the vital thing was a button. It was lodged in a corner made by one of

the small wooden rims that go up the window casing parallel with the window. Anyone could have overlooked it, hardly visible in this little angle where it might have been sent by the cleaner's duster as she flicked about the sill and the ledge. It was a metal button of the kind used on men's clothes to fasten their braces to, and it bore round it in raised letters the name of a fashionable tailor.

By the time they had done all this it was coming on for morning. They slipped out of the building and went to an all-night restaurant near-by to wait for daylight when O'Mally had decided to make an inspection of the roof of the church. He and Babbitts would do this, while Stevens, as soon as the day was far enough advanced, was commissioned to go to the tailor whose name was on the button, and find out when and for whom he had made any suits having that button upon them.

Meantime the day had broken into morning. With a caution to Babbitts to stay where he was O'Mally sauntered off to see about fixing things for getting on the roof of the church. Babbitts was left wondering whether they were going to be plumbers or tin workers or members of the congregation admiring the sacred edifice. But when O'Mally came back he'd got a new one on Soapy, for he'd depicted them to the sexton as an architect and builder from the West who were so struck by the dome they wanted to get up on the roof and study its proportions.

Fortunately it was a black, heavy day, the kind when the lights shine out in dark offices and people come to the windows and yank up the shades. If anyone did notice them they'd have looked like a couple of men searching for a leak, especially as they were busy in one spot—the space below the two windows marked by the burnt ends of the matches O'Mally had dropped.

And here, with the scattered matches all around it, caught in a ledge just above the gutter, they made the greatest find of all—a scarf pin. It was a star sapphire set in a twist of gold and platinum. An hour after they had it in their possession it was identified by George and Mr. Whitney as one they had seen on Johnston Barker the morning of January fifteenth.

From the tailor came further testimony. He identified the button as made from a new mould, the first consignment of which he had received late in December. So far he had only used it on two suits, one for a mining man from Nevada and the other for Johnston Barker—a dark brown cheviot with a reddish line. This had been the suit Barker had on when he visited the Whitney office that morning.

When he came to the end of all this I was balanced on the edge of the sofa, with my feet braced on the floor to keep from sliding off and my eyes glued on my loving spouse.

"Do you mean he came *down* from one window to the other, Soapy?"



Babbitts nodded:

"Lowering himself by a rope fastened to the upper cleat which his weight loosened."

"But—my goodness!" I was aghast at the idea. "A man of Barker's age dangling down along the wall that you could see for miles!"

"You couldn't have seen him twenty feet off. The wall's dark and it was a black dark night. If you'd been watching with a glass you couldn't have made out anything at that height and at that hour."

"But the danger of it?"

"He was on a desperate job and had to take chances. Besides it's not as risky as it sounds. The distance he had to drop was short. The ceilings are low in those office buildings and the awning supports have to be unusually strong because of the summer storms. And then the man himself was small and light and is known to have kept himself in the pink of condition. With a strong rope thrown over the cleat he could easily have swung himself to the story below, stood on the stone ledge which his feet scratched, and pushed up the window which Ford had probably left slightly raised."

"The whole thing was a plot?"

"A consummate plot—not a murder committed on the spur of the moment but a murder carefully planned. Whitney thinks Barker had scented Harland's suspicions long before they broke out in the quarrel, in fact that he had provoked it to give color to the suicide theory. When Barker went up that afternoon the rope was under his coat. When Ford left the Azalea Woods Estates early he knew every move he was to make from that time till he boarded the elevator. There were only two weak spots in it, the open window on the seventeenth floor and the length of time that Harland was supposed to have been in the corridor—the two points upon which Whitney based his suspicions."

I was silent a minute, turning it over in my mind, then I said slowly:

"When Barker was coming down that way—it would have taken some time wouldn't it?—Harland must have been in the front office."

"Yes. O'Mally's puzzled over that point—What kept him there?"

"Looks like he might have had a date with someone," I said pondering.

"Ford, of course, but nobody can imagine what he wanted to see Ford about. Oh, there's a lot of broken links in the chain yet."

I looked on the floor, frowning and thoughtful:

"It's awful strange. I'd like to know what made him come down there—what was put up to him to lure him that way to his death."



# CHAPTER IX

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

With the fitting of the murder on Johnston Barker, the office of Whitney & Whitney drew in its breath, took a cinch in its belt, and went at the work with a quiet, deadly zest. It was the most sensational and one of the biggest cases that had ever come their way. No one on the inside could have failed to feel the thrill of it, the horror of the crime, and the excitement of the subterranean chase for the criminal.

I was as keen as the rest of them, but there was one feature of the secret investigations that I detested—the dragging in of Carol Whitehall's name. It couldn't be helped. The affair had taken place in her offices, but it was hateful to me to hear her mentioned in our conferences, even though it was merely as an outside figure, a person as ignorant of the true state of the case as Troop or Mrs. Hansen.

The tapped phone message and the subsequent trip to Rochester had given me no end of a jar. Up till then I couldn't imagine her as caring for Barker. Everybody admitted that his private life had been beyond reproach—entirely free from entanglements with women—but even so I couldn't picture the girl I'd met in New Jersey in love with him. He was between fifty and sixty, more than twice her age. George said it was his money, but George has lived among the fashionable rich, women who'd marry an octogenarian for a house on Fifth Avenue and a string of pearls. I would have staked my last dollar she wasn't that kind—proud and pure as Diana, only giving herself where her heart went first.

But if it had been hard to imagine her as fond of Barker the magnate, what was it now when he was Barker the murderer? It made me sick. All I could hope for was that we'd get him and save the unfortunate girl by showing her what he was. And while we were doing this it was up to us to keep her out of it, shield her

and protect her in every possible way. She was a lady, the kind of woman that every man wants to keep aloof from anything sordid and brutal.

I was thinking this one morning, a few days after our last *séance*, on my way to the office. I had been detained on work uptown and was late, entering upon a conference of the chief, George and O'Mally. When I heard what they'd been evolving, I didn't show the expected enthusiasm. Miss Whitehall was to be asked to come to Whitney & Whitney's that afternoon, the hope being to trap or beguile her into some information about Barker's whereabouts. It was the chief's plan—a poor one, I thought, and said so—but he was as enigmatic as usual, remarking that whether it succeeded or not, he wanted to see her. It didn't add to my good humor to hear that, as I knew the girl, they'd selected me for their messenger.

Not being able to strike straight at their subject they'd framed up a story, one that would give them scope for questions and be a sufficiently plausible excuse to get her there. It seemed to me absurd, but the old man was satisfied with it. Everybody now knew that Harland had been her silent partner. Their story was that they'd heard Barker was also in the enterprise, she'd had a double backing, his visits to her office gave color to the rumor, and so forth and so on. I left the office while they were conning it over.

As I mounted the stairs to her apartment I felt a good deal of a cad. If it had been anyone else, or any other kind of a woman—but that fine, high-spirited creature! A group of men trying to make a fool of her—beastly! Why had I said I'd do it—and why the devil had she got mixed up in such an ugly business?

A servant opened the door and showed me up a hall into the parlor. She was there sitting at a desk littered with papers, and rose with a faint surprised smile when she saw me. As we sat down and I made my apologies for intruding, I had a chance to observe her and was struck by the change in her. It was less than a year since we'd last met and she looked singularly different. Handsome of course—she'd always be that—but another kind of woman. At first I thought it was because she was paler and thinner—she'd been a radiant, blooming Amazon in the country—but after a few minutes I saw it was something—how can I express it?—more of the spirit than the body. The joyousness and gayety had gone out of her, and the spontaneity—I noticed that especially. I could feel constraint in her composure as if she was on her dignity.

As I explained my mission—I couldn't say much, and felt beastly uncomfortable while I was doing it—she listened with an expressionless, polite attention. When I had finished she made no comment, merely saying she would be only too happy to do anything for Mr. Whitney, then passed on to her own affairs, mentioning the failure of the Azalea Woods Estates and that she thought she and her

mother would return to the country. I was on the verge of offering to finance her in a new deal and then remembered I was there as an emissary, not as a friend. It rattled me and the rattling wasn't helped when I met her eyes, brown and soft, but with something scrutinizing and watchful under their velvety darkness.

I stayed longer than I meant to—longer than I needed to. Some way or other our talk shifted round to Azalea and Longwood, to Firehill and the people we knew all through there. I forgot about the matter I'd come on, and she brightened up too and there was a gleam of the girl I'd met a year ago. But when I rose to leave the other woman was back, the reserved, poised woman who seemed shut in a shell of conventional politeness. She said she'd come that afternoon about five—she had work to do that would keep her till then. In the doorway she suddenly smiled and held out her hand. The feel of it, soft and warm, was in mine when I got out into the street.

I went back to the office feeling meaner than a yellow dog. Thank Heaven I'd not have to do *that* again. They'd get all they could out of her, and that would be the last time Whitney & Whitney would want to see her. Later on, in a week or two maybe, I could call on her again. The ice was broken, and anyway I didn't see but what it was my duty. Someone ought to help her to get on her feet again and as she'd no man in her own family the least I could do was to offer my services.

At five the chief, George and I were waiting for her. She was a little late and as she came in I noticed that she had more color than she'd had in the morning. She looked splendid, in a dark fur coat and some kind of a close-fitting hat with her black hair curling out below the edge. Her manner was cool and tranquil, not a hint about her of surprise or uneasiness, only that heightened color which I set down to the hurry she'd been in getting there.

The chief was as gracious as if he'd been welcoming her as a guest in his house—full of apologies, waving her to an armchair, suggesting she take off her coat as the room was warm. No outsider would ever have guessed what was going on in that astute and subtle mind. A feeling of indignant pity rose in me—she seemed so unsuspecting. But—No; it's better for me to describe the scene as it occurred, to try and make you see it as I did.

When the necessary politenesses were disposed of, the old man, very delicately, with all his tact and finesse, started on the frame-up. He did it admirably, finishing on a sort of confidential note. As the attorney for the Copper Pool group, it would facilitate matters if he knew of all Barker's activities; any information, the slightest, would be helpful.

She answered readily, without surprise, almost as if she might have heard the story before.

"You've been misinformed, Mr. Whitney. Mr. Barker had no interest in the Azalea Woods Estates. He had nothing to do with it."

The old man pursed out his lips and raised his brows:

"I see, one of those groundless rumors that gather about a sensational event. It probably started from the fact, mentioned in the papers, that Barker was in your office that afternoon."

"Probably. He came to see me about a house he was going to build in the tract. Of course that's all ended in nothing now."

He looked at her from under his bushy brows, a kind, fatherly glance:

"I was very sorry to hear, Miss Whitehall, that you were one of the sufferers in this double disaster we are trying to settle."

"Oh, I!" she gave a slight shrug of her shoulders. "I'm wiped out."

"Tch!" he shook his head frowning and resentful. "These men can knife each other—pirates in a buccaneer warfare—but when it comes to dragging down women I'd like to see them all strung up."

Her eyes gave a flash. It was like a spark struck from a flint, there and then gone. As if it had surprised her, and she was determined to guard against its return, the calm of her face intensified into an almost mask-like quiet. She answered softly:

"I can't go so far as that, Mr. Whitney. I'm sure there's some explanation—as to Mr. Barker, I mean."

"I hope so," said the chief, "for your sake if for no other. I hope he'll come back and make the restitution he owes his associates and discharge that obligation about the house and lot."

He looked at her smiling, a rallying smile that said as plain as words, he knew such hopes to be groundless. She did not smile back, simply raised her eyebrows and gave a slight nod. George, who was facing her, leaned forward and said as if he had just met her at a pink tea and was being gallantly sympathetic:

"It was rather hard on you, Miss Whitehall, having those two men in your place that day. The press must have made your life a burden."

"It wasn't so bad. Some reporters called me up but when they found how little I knew they left me alone. I hadn't anything exciting to say. Both interviews were nothing but business."

"But let me ask you a question—not for publication this time, just as a thing I'm curious about. It was only a few hours after you saw him that Harland killed himself. Wasn't there anything unusual in his manner, anything to suggest that he was not himself?"

She looked down at the purse she was holding in her lap, and said slowly, clasping and unclasping the catch:

"I didn't notice anything—unless perhaps he was a little irritable and nervous. I certainly never would have thought he was in the state of a man contemplating suicide."

"And you would have known," said the chief. He turned to George in explanation. "As Harland's partner, Miss Whitehall would have known him well enough to notice any marked change in him."

I was watching her closely and as the glances of the two men met I saw uneasiness well up through the quietude of her face. Then for the first time I suspected that she was not as composed as she seemed. Her words confirmed the suspicion, they came quickly in hurried denial:

"No—I didn't know him well. I saw him very seldom. We were not in the least—what—what you'd call friends or even close acquaintances. It was all purely business."

The chief nodded, a slight, Mandarin-like teetering of his head, which gave the impression of a polite agreement in a matter that didn't interest him.

"Purely business," he murmured, then again turned to George. "What Miss Whitehall says would bear out the general idea that it was that last interview which drove Harland to desperation."

As they spoke she looked from one to the other, a glance that passed over both faces as quick as a lightning flash. Before they could turn, it was gone and her eyes had a dense, dead look as if she had dropped some inner veil over them. Then I *knew* that the brain behind that smooth white forehead was something more than alert, it was on its guard, wary and watchful.

The knowledge made me suddenly speak. I wanted to see, I had to see, if that careful control would hold under a direct question about her lover.

"How about Barker? How did *he* act when you saw him that afternoon?"

She shifted slightly to see me better.

"Oh, perfectly naturally. There was nothing in the least unusual about him."

"Barker was a man of iron," said the chief. "His mental disturbances didn't show on the outside. Besides," he gave a wave of his hand toward her—"this young lady knew him only slightly." He turned quickly to her, "I'm right, am I not?"

"Perfectly," she fixed her eyes on him and kept them there, black and unfathomable. "My acquaintance with him was simply that of an agent with a customer."

For a moment I couldn't look at her; I got up and going to the window fumbled with the blind. The man she'd tried to run away with—and telling her lie with that smooth steadiness! It was only love could give such nerve. Behind me

I heard the old man's voice:

"A horrible affair. It was fortunate for you you escaped the sight of it."

"Ah—" it was a sound of shuddering protest—*that* would have been too much. I knew nothing of it till I saw the papers the next morning. It made me ill—I was at home for several days."

"Well," said he, "I'm in hopes we're going to straighten things out before long."

I turned from the window and moved back, wondering what he was going to say. She was looking again at her purse, snapping and unsnapping the clasp.

"How can you do that?" she asked.

"Haven't you read in the papers that Barker's been seen in Philadelphia?"

"Ah yes," she murmured, her glance still on the purse. "But nobody's found him yet."

"Give us time—give us time. These vanishing gentlemen like a change of air. They don't stay long under our hospitable flag. Their goal is Canada."

For a moment she had no reply. You could see it, you could see the effort with which she held her statue-calm pose, but a deep breath lifted her breast and the edge of her teeth showed on her underlip.

"Canada," said the old man with a comfortable roll in his big chair, "is our modern American equivalent of the medieval sanctuary."

She'd got her nerve back—I never saw such grit. She gave him a smile, not jolly like his, but defiant.

"Of course," she said, "a sort of Cave of Adullum." Then she rose and looking at him from under her eyelids added, "But if a man's clever enough to get to the Cave of Adullum I should think he'd be too clever to stay there."

She turned and took her coat from the chair back. George made a jump to help her and the old man heaved himself up, breaking out with renewed apologies for the trouble he'd given her. They were like people separating after a social function, he bland and courteous, she gracious and deprecating.

"If I could be of any service to you I'd be only too glad. But"—she gave that little shrug of her shoulders—"I'm so unimportant. A poor working woman whose orbit happened by chance to cross those of two great luminaries."

"There's nothing for anybody to do but us," said George, standing behind her and holding out her coat. "And we'll do it. You'll see some morning in the paper that we've got our hands on Barker—the high-class sneak."

He and his father worked so well together that he told me afterward he knew the old man would be watching her. He was and so was I, and at those words I saw the rich color spread to her forehead and again that flash, like a leap



of flame, shine in her eyes. She knew it too and dropped her lids over it, but the color she couldn't control and it glowed in crimson on her cheeks as she answered with a sort of soft tolerance:

"Oh, Mr. Whitney, hunting criminals has made you unjust." Then as the coat slipped on she flashed a look at him over her shoulder, "But I don't think it's real! The profession requires a pose."

George was quite bowled over. He had no answer and she knew it, turning from him with a smile and moving toward the door. Halfway there the old man stopped her.

"Oh, by the way—one thing more that nearly slipped my memory. You no doubt saw in the papers that Harland is supposed to have spent the half-hour before he jumped, in the corridor of your floor. Did you see him there—as you left, I mean?"

"I?" she raised her eyebrows in artless, surprised query. "No, I'd gone before he came down. I left about six, or maybe a little before."

"Um!" he nodded. "You were probably in the elevator."

"Yes, probably—" her purse dropped from her hand to the floor. We all started forward to pick it up but she was too quick for us and had it before any of us could reach it. As she righted herself from the sudden stoop her face was deeply flushed. "Yes, of course, I must have been in the elevator," she finished with a slight gasp as if the quick movement had impeded her breathing.

"I see, of course," agreed the chief moving beside her to the door. "It merely interested me as a student of morbid psychology. I'd like to have known how a man of Harland's type looked, moved, comported himself, while such a struggle went on in his mind."

At the door there were general good-byes, a very cordial parting all round. I slipped out behind her to escort her through the hall to the elevator. As we brushed along side by side she said nothing and glimpsing down at her face, I saw it set in a still pondering—sphinx-like it seemed to me.

Waiting for the car I said a few civil commonplaces to which she made short conventional answers. Biting her lip, her eyes on the ground, she looked preoccupied, impatient, I thought, for the car to come. I wanted to ask her if I could see her again, but I didn't dare, she seemed so indifferent, so shut away in her own brooding. But when she entered the elevator and the gate shut, I saw her through the grill-work, looking at me from behind that iron barrier, and the sight stirred me like a hand clasped on my heart.

It wasn't only the expression of her face, which was sad, almost tragic, but it was a strange and eerie suggestion that it was like a face looking through the

bars of a prison. The thought haunted me as I walked back.

In the office George and the chief were talking over the interview. They'd noted every tone of her voice, every change of her color. That she'd lied had not surprised them. She had had to lie.

"Must love the old rascal to death," George commented.

The chief rose lumberingly and moved to his cigar box on the mantelpiece.

"I understand now why Barker—who never was known to care for a woman—finally fell. She's a splendid creature—brains and beauty."

"Both to burn," George agreed. "You couldn't get much out of her."

"All I wanted just now," said his father, striking a match, "the rest'll come in time."

I was just going to ask him what more he expected, when a clerk opened the door and said:

"Mrs. Babbitts is outside to see Mr. Whitney."

The chief squared round like a flash, the lit match dropping to the hearth. His face, usually heavy and stolid, lit into an almost avid eagerness.

"Show her in," he ordered and the clerk disappeared.

"What are you expecting to get from Molly?" George asked. "Isn't she finished?"

"Not quite." The old man's eyes were on the door, his cigar unlit in his hand. I hadn't often seen him so openly on the qui vive. "Molly's had further orders."

"What?"

"You'll see," was the answer.

Molly entered with the cold of the night still around her. Her long coat was buttoned wrong, her hat on one side. Haste was written all over her, haste and that bright-eyed, jubilant exhilaration that took possession of her when things were moving her way. She was like a little game dog on the scent, and I'd often heard the old man say she'd make the best woman detective he'd ever known. He was awfully fond of her, and took a sort of paternal pride in her nerve and cleverness, just as he did in George's.

"Well, Molly," he said—"got that stuff for me?"

She nodded, her little body seeming to radiate a quivering energy:

"Today at the lunch hour. I came the minute I got off."

"Go ahead. I said not to tell anybody till you told me first. Well, you're going to tell me first now."

Standing by the table, her eyes bright on the old man, she said slowly and clearly:

"Troop says he never took Miss Whitehall down from her offices on the night of January the fifteenth."

George gave a smothered ejaculation and started forward. I was transfixed—not believing my ears. Only the chief looked unmoved, leaning against the mantelpiece, holding Molly's glance with his.

"Go on," he growled.

"He says that he was there later than usual, until eight, because of the accident and the other car being broken. Before that he took down the two Azalea Woods Estates clerks, Iola Barry and Tony Ford, but not Miss Whitehall. After the accident he ran out into the street, and when he came back the people were on every landing ringing the bells and wild because the elevator didn't come. He went up and took them off, but Miss Whitehall wasn't among them. He said that he'd heard some of them got tired of waiting and went by the stairs."

"He thought Miss Whitehall went that way?"

"Yes, it was the only way she could have gone. He supposed she'd got impatient or hysterical and just rushed pell-mell down."

"Did Troop or anyone else see her in the lower hall or leaving the building?"

"No, I questioned him careful about that. He thought she'd seen the excitement on Broadway and run down and maybe met someone who'd told her what had happened. And not wanting to get in it she'd gone out the side door. Anyway he said she wasn't in the ground floor hall, or out in the street with the others or he'd have seen her."

There was a pause. In that pause—like figures in a picture—I saw George, amazed, petrified, staring at his father, Molly looking from one to the other, and the chief with his brows low down and his head drooped, gazing at the fire. In a moment they would burst into speech—the speech that was withheld while that astounding revelation found acceptance in their minds.

To hear what they said—to listen to what I couldn't believe and yet couldn't contradict—was more than I could stand just then. Without a word, unnoticed by any of them, I slipped out, fled down the hall, into the elevator and out to the street.

It was cold, a sharp, frosty night, with a few stars shining in the deep-blue sky. Dark masses of men flowed out of the doors of skyscrapers and drained away down the subway entrances. I jostled through them, elbowing them right and left, instinctively turning my face uptown, deaf to the curses that followed me, blind to the lights that stretched in a spangled vista in front.

What did it mean? What *could* it mean? I'd understood the lie about Barker but now those other lies! She had said she went down about six, in the elevator. I'd

heard her, there was no getting away from it. Was *that* the reason the old man had wanted to see her? Suddenly I saw again his look of hungry expectation when Molly was announced, and with a stifled sound, I stopped short. As lightning plays upon a dark landscape, for a moment showing it plain, I had a clear glimpse of the line of thought he'd been pursuing. The horror of it held me rooted there, rigid as a dead man, in the midst of the hurrying crowd.

Incredible—hideous—unbelievable! Association with criminals had warped and diseased his judgment. And then like a sinister shadow, creeping on me dark and ominous, rose the memory of her guarded face, the flame of color she couldn't hide, the dropped purse. I started out again, fighting the shadow, but all I had to fight with was my belief in her. She couldn't—it was impossible, I'd die swearing it. And battering against that belief, came questions, insistent, maddening. Why couldn't she speak out? Why didn't she admit the truth—say that Barker was her lover and have done with it? Why had she lied—about him, about the time she left, about everything she could have frankly admitted, if—if— When I got there I could go no farther. Cursing under my breath I forged along, the air ice-cold on the sweat that was damp on my forehead.

# CHAPTER X

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

Friday night I brought the information from Troop in to Mr. Whitney, and knew then for the first time why he wanted it.

Gee, it was an awful thought!

As I sat there between him and Mr. George—Jack Reddy went away, I don't know why—with neither of them saying a word, I saw, like it was a vision, the Harland case spreading out black and dreadful. It made me think of ink spilled on a map, running slow but sure over places that were bright and clean, trickling away in directions no one ever thought it would take.

I left soon after Jack, as I could see they wanted to get rid of me. Before I went the old man said to try and get a line on the Whitehalls' servant—I might work it through Iola—and find out what time Miss Whitehall came home the night of January fifteenth. If I couldn't manage it I was to let him know and it could be passed on to O'Mally, but he thought I had the best chances. That, as far as he knew now, was the last he'd need of me. My work at the Black Eagle was done. The next day would be my last one there. Say nothing to anyone about it—simply drop out. The reappearance of Miss McCalmont was his affair.

In the next twenty-four hours things came swift, as they do in these cases. You'll have a long spell with the wires dead, then suddenly they'll begin to hum. And you've got to be ready when it happens—jump quick as lightning. I learned that in the Hesketh case.

The first chance came that night, was sitting in the parlor when I reached home—Iola! She had the hope of a new job—a good one—and wanted a recommendation letter from Miss Whitehall, and naturally, being Iola, couldn't go unless I came along and held the sponge.

It was so pat you'd think fate had fixed it, and it worked out as pat as it began. While Iola was in the parlor getting her letter I stayed in the kitchen—very meek and humble—and when the servant came back—Delia was her name—started in to help her with the dishes. We grew neighborly over the work, she washing and I wiping, and what was more natural than that we'd work around to the affairs of the ladies. They'd lost all their money and Delia was going to leave. How did that happen now? Sure, it's the feller that killed himself done it—didn't I know? I only had to let her talk, she was the flannel-mouth Irish kind. Here are the facts as they went in to Whitney & Whitney the next day.

Miss Whitehall was generally very punctual, always getting home about half-past six. On the night of January fifteenth she didn't get back till a quarter to eight. Such a delay was evidently not expected as Mrs. Whitehall became extremely nervous, couldn't keep still or settle to anything. At a quarter to eight, hearing the key inserted in the door, Delia had gone into the hall, and seen Miss Whitehall enter. She was very pale and agitated. Delia had never seen her look so upset. She walked up the passage, met her mother and without a word they went into a bedroom and shut the door.

At dinner she ate nothing and hardly spoke at all—looked and acted as if she was sick. The next morning when she read of the Harland suicide in the paper she nearly fainted, and after that was in bed for three days, prostrated by the shock, she told Delia.

I guessed this would be my last piece of work on the Harland case and I wasn't sorry. There was an awfulness coming over it that was too much for me. But it wasn't, not by a long shot. I was in deeper than I knew, so deep—but that comes later. I'll go on now to tell what happened that last night I was in the Black Eagle Building.

It was coming on for closing time and I was making ready to go. I'd cleared up all my little belongings, and was standing by the switchboard pressing the tray cloth careful into my satchel, when I heard a step stop at the door and a cheerful voice sing out:

"Just in the nick of time. Spreading her wings ready for flight."

There in the doorway, filling it up with his big shape, was Tony Ford. For the first moment I got a sort of setback. Mightn't anyone—thinking of home and husband and finding yourself face to face with a gunman?

With one hand still in the satchel I stood eyeing him, not a word out of me, solemn as a tombstone. It didn't phase him a bit. Teetering from his heels to his toes, a grin on him like the slit in a post box, he stood there as calm as if he'd never come nearer murder than to spell it in the fourth grade.

"It just came to me a few moments ago—as I was passing by here—that the prettiest and smartest hello girl in New York mightn't have gone home yet," he said.

Now if you're experienced about men—and take it from me hello girls *are*—you never believe a word a chap like Tony Ford hands out. But hearing those words and looking at his broad, conceited face, it came to me that these were true. He'd been passing, suddenly thought of me, and dropped in to see if I was there.

"Well," I answered, "here I am. What of it?"

"First of it," he said, "is how long are you going to be there?"

"Till I get this satchel closed," I said and pressing hard on the catch it snapped shut.

"And second of it," he went on, "is where are you going afterward?"

My first thought was I was going to get away from *him* as fast as the Interborough System could take me—and then I had a second thought. Why had Tony Ford dropped in so opportune at my closing hour? To ask me to dinner. And why couldn't I, hired to do work for Whitney & Whitney, do a little extra for good measure? I knew they wanted to hear Ford's own account of what he did the evening of January fifteenth, but that they couldn't get it. What was the matter with me, Molly Babbitts, getting it for them?

It flashed into my head like lightning and it didn't flash out again. Frightened? Not a bit! Keyed up though—like your blood begins to run quick. I'd taken some risky dares in my time but it was a new one on me to dine with a murderer. But honest, besides the pleasure of doing something for the old man, there was a creepy sort of thrill about it that strung up my nerves and made me feel like I was going to shoot Niagara in a barrel.

"Going home, eh?" said he. "It's a long, cold ride home."

"That's the first truth you've said," I answered. "And for showing me you can do it I'll offer you my grateful thanks."

I began to put on my gloves, he standing in the doorway watching.

"To break the journey with a little bit of dinner might be a good idea."

"It might," I said, "if anybody had it."

"I have it. I've had it all day."

"What's the good of having it if you haven't got the price." I picked up my satchel and looked cool and pitying at him. "Unless you're calculating to take me to the bread line."

"There you wrong me," he answered. "Nothing but the best for you," and putting his hand into his vest pocket he drew out a roll of bills, folding them back one by one and giving each a name, "Canvas back, terrapin, champagne, oyster

crabs, alligator pears, anything the lady calls for."

Those greenbacks, flirted over so carelessly by his strong, brown fingers, gave me the horrors. Blood money! I drew back. If he hadn't been blocking up the entrance, I think I'd have quit it and made a break for the open. He glanced up and saw my face, and I guess it looked queer.

"What are you staring so for? They're not counterfeit."

The feeling passed, and anyway I couldn't get out without squeezing by him and I didn't want to touch him any more than I would a spider.

"I was calculating how much of it I could eat," I said. "My folks don't like me to dine out so when I do I try to catch up with all the times I've refused."

"Come along then," he said, stepping back from the doorway. "I know a bully little joint not far from here. You can catch up there if you've been refusing dinners since the first telephone was installed."

So off we trotted into the night, I and the murderer!

Can you see into my mind—it was boiling with thoughts like a Hammam bath with steam? What would Soapy say? He'd be raging, but after all he couldn't do anything more than rage. You can't divorce a woman for dining with a murderer, especially if she only does it once. Mr. Whitney'd be all right. If I got what I intended to get he'd pass me compliments that would take O'Mally's pride down several pegs. As for myself—Tony Ford wouldn't want to murder me. There was nothing in it, and judging by the pleasant things he said as we walked to the restaurant, you'd think to keep me alive and well was the dearest wish of his heart.

The restaurant was one of those quiet foreign ones, in an old dwelling house, sandwiched in among shops and offices. It was a decent place—I'd been there for lunch with Iola—in the daytime full of business people, and at night having the sort of crowd that gathers where boarding houses and downtown apartments and hotels for foreigners give up their dead.

We found a table in a corner of the front room, with the wall to one side of us and the long curtains of the window behind me. There were a lot of people and a few waiters, one of whom Mr. Ford summoned with a haughty jerk of his head. Then he sprawled grandly in his chair with menus and wine lists, telling the waiter how to serve things that were hot and ice things that were cold till you'd suppose he'd been a chef along with all his other jobs. He put on a great deal of side, like he was a cattle king from Chicago trying to impress a Pilgrim Father from Boston. The only way it impressed me was to make me think a gunman with blood on his soul wasn't so different from an innocent clerk with nothing to trouble him but the bill at the end.



As he was doing this I took off my veil and gloves, careful to pull off my wedding ring—I wasn't going to have that sidetracking him—and thinking how I'd begin.

We were through the soup and on the fish when I decided the time was ripe to ring the bell and start. I did it quietly:

"I guess you've got a new place?"

"No, I'm still one of the unemployed. Don't I act like it?" He smiled, a patronizing smirk, pleased he'd got the hello girl guessing.

"You act to me like the young millionaire cutting his teeth on Broadway."

He lifted his glass of white wine and sipped it:

"I inherited some money this winter from an uncle up-state. You're not drinking your wine. Don't you like it?"

In his tone, and a shifting of his eyes to the next table, I caught a suggestion of something not easy, put on. Maybe if you hadn't known what I did you wouldn't have noticed what was plain to me—he didn't like the subject.

"No, I never touch wine," I answered. "I don't want to speak unfeelingly but it was mighty convenient your uncle died just as your business failed. Wasn't it too bad about Miss Whitehall?"

"Very unfortunate, poor girl. Bad for me but worse for her."

"She had no idea it was coming, I suppose?"

He looked up sudden and sharp:

"*What* was coming?"

His small gray eyes sent a glance piercing into mine, full of a quick, arrested attention.

"Why—why—the ruin of Mr. Harland."

"Oh, *that*," he was easy again, "I thought you meant the suicide. I don't know whether she knew or not. Waiter"—he turned and made one of those grandstand plays to the waiter—"take this away and bring on the next."

"She'd have known that night as soon as she heard he was dead but I guess she was so paralyzed she didn't think of herself."

"I don't know what she thought of. She wasn't in the office."

I dropped my eyes to my plate. Eliza crossing on the ice didn't have anything over me in the way she picked her steps.

"Oh, she'd gone before it happened?"

"Yes. I left early myself that night—before she did. I was halfway home when I remembered some papers I'd said I'd go over and had to hike back for them. She was gone when I got there. And just think how gruesome it was, when I was going down in the elevator Harland jumped, struck the street a few minutes

before I reached the bottom."

Could you beat it! Knowing what had been done in that closed office, knowing what was going to be done while he was sliding down from story to story and then getting it off that way, as smooth as cream. A sick feeling rose up inside me. I wanted to get away from him and see an honest face and feel the cold, fresh air. Dining with a gunman wasn't as easy as I'd thought.

Tony Ford, leaning across his plate, tapped on the cloth with his knife handle to emphasize his words:

"He must have been up that side corridor waiting. When he heard the gate shut and the car go down, he came out, walked to the hall window and jumped. Ugh!" he gave a wriggling movement with his broad shoulders. "*That* takes nerve!"

I suppose sometimes in crowds you pass murderers, but you don't know them for what they are. Probably never again if I lived to be a hundred, would I sit this way, not only conversing with one, but conversing about his crime. It wasn't what you'd look back on afterward as one of the happy memories of your life, but it was a red-letter experience. I had a vision of telling my grandchildren how once, when I was young, I talked with one of the blackest criminals of his day on the subject of the deed he'd helped commit.

"It's a fortunate thing he left no family." It was something to say, and I had to keep him moving along the same line. "You'd suppose he'd have married again, being wealthy and handsome."

Mr. Ford, who was lighting a cigarette, smiled to himself and said: "So you would."

"And I guess he could have had his pick. Maybe he cared for someone who didn't reciprocate."

He threw away the match and lolled back in his chair.

"Maybe," he said with a meaning secret air.

It wouldn't have taken a girl just landed at Ellis Island to see that he wanted to be questioned. It was out on him like a rash. So not to disappoint him and also being curious I asked:

"Was he in love with someone?"

He said nothing but blew a smoke ring into the air, staring at it as it floated away. I waited while he blew another ring, the look on his face as conscious as an actor's when he has the middle of the stage. Then he spoke in a weighty tone:

"Harland was in love—madly in love."

This was news to me. I hadn't looked for it and I didn't know where it might lead. I didn't have to hide my interest; he expected it, was gratified when he saw me open-mouthed. But he had to do a little more acting, and tapping on his wine

glass with his forefinger said languid to the waiter:

"Fill it up—the lady won't take any." Then, his eyes following the smoke rings—"Nobody had an idea of it—nobody but me. I knew Harland better than many who considered themselves his friends."

"You knew him," it came out of me before I thought, or I'd never have put the accent on the "you" that way.

"I knew him well. He'd—er—taken rather a fancy to me."

I couldn't say anything—the man he'd killed! Fortunately he didn't notice me. The wine he'd taken was beginning to make him less sharp. Not that he was under the influence, but he was not so clear-headed and his natural vanity was coming up plainer every minute. He went on:

"I met him quite casually in the Black Eagle Building and then—well, something about me attracted him. Anyway we grew friendly—and—er—that's how I stumbled on his secret."

"His love?"

He inclined his head majestically:

"You can see how it was possible when I tell you the lady was Miss Whitehall."

Believe *me* I got a thrill! There was a second when I had to bite on my under lip to keep an exclamation from bursting out. *This* was something, something that no one had had a suspicion of, something that might lead—I couldn't follow it then—that time, what I had to do was to find out everything he knew.

"Are you sure?" I breathed out incredulous.

"Perfectly. He was daffy about her."

"You just guessed it?"

He suddenly wheeled in his chair and looked at me, with that same piercing, almost fierce look I'd seen before. The wine he'd been drinking showed red in his face, and in his manner there was a roughness that was new.

"Of course I guessed it. A man like Harland doesn't go round *telling* you he's in love. But I'm a pretty sharp chap. Many things don't escape me. He didn't have to tell me. I was on the spot and I *saw*."

Why didn't Iola see? She was on the spot too and when it came to romance no man that breathes has anything on Iola. I ventured as carefully as if I was walking on the subway tracks, and didn't know which was the third rail.

"He tried to keep it a secret?"

"Oh, he tried and I guess he did except from little Tony."

"What did she feel—Miss Whitehall—about him?"

"Not the way he did."

"Perhaps there was someone else?"

A meaning look came over his face and he said softly:

"Perhaps there was."

"Who?"

I don't know whether it was an interest that stole into my voice without my knowledge or some instinct that warned him, but suddenly he pulled himself up. The lounging swagger dropped from him, and he gave me a look from under his eyebrows, sullen and questioning. Then like a big animal, restless and uneasy, he glanced over the littered-up table, pushing his napkin in among the glasses and muttering something about the wine. I didn't want him to know I was watching and hunted in my lap for my gloves. But to say I was keen isn't the word, for I could see into him as if his chest was plate glass and what I saw was that he was scared he'd said too much.

"How should I know?" he suddenly exclaimed, as if there'd been no pause. "I don't know anything about Miss Whitehall. Just happening to be round in the office I caught on to Harland's infatuation. Anyone would. She may have a dozen strings to her bow for all I know or care." He gave me an investigating look—how was I taking it?—and I smiled innocently back. That reassured him and he twisted round in his chair, snapping his fingers at the waiter, "Here, lively—my bill. Don't keep us waiting all night."

The waiter who'd been hovering round watching us eating through those layers of food darted off like a dog freed from the leash. Mr. Ford subsided back into his chair. He was more at ease, but not all right yet as his words proved.

"Don't you go quoting me, now, as having said anything about Harland and Miss Whitehall. He's in his grave, poor chap, and I don't like to figure as having talked over his private affairs. Doesn't look well, you know."

"Sure," I said comfortably. "I'm on."

My gloves were buttoned and my veil down. Mr. Ford, leaning his elbows on the table, was looking at me with what he thought was a romantic gaze, long and deep. In my opinion he looked like a fool—men mostly do when they're trying to be sentimental on a heavy meal. But I wasn't worrying about that. What was engaging me was how I could shake him without telling him who I was or where I lived. In the first excitement of corralling him I'd never thought of it. Now the result of my rash act was upon me. If you ever dine with a murderer, take my advice—when you start in lay your pipes for getting out.

As we waited for that bill I was as uncomfortable as if I had to pay it. Suppose I couldn't escape and he followed me home? Babbitts would be like the mad elephant in the Zoo, and from what I knew of Tony Ford he might draw a pistol

and make me a widow.

"Have you enjoyed your dinner, little one?" said he, soft and slushy.

"Fine!" I answered, pulling my coat off the chair back.

"We've got to be good friends, haven't we?"

"Pals," I said.

"Don't you think we know each other well enough for you to tell me your name?"

"They say there's a great charm about the unknown," I answered. "And I want to be as charming as it's possible with the restrictions nature's put upon me."

"You don't need any extra trimmings," said he. "You might as well tell me, for I can always find out at the Black Eagle Building."

Could he? I was Miss Morgenthau there, and today was positively my last appearance. If I could get away from him now I was safe from his ever finding me.

The waiter brought the bill with murmurings that it was to be paid at the desk. We rose, Mr. Ford feeling in his pocket, the waiter trying to look listless, as if money was no treat to him. I moved across the room and reconnoitered. The desk, with a fat gray-haired woman sitting behind it, was close by the door that led into the hall. Several people were out there putting on coats and hats and jabbering together in a foreign lingo. I sauntered carelessly through the doorway, seeing, out of the tail of my eye, Mr. Ford put down a twenty-dollar bill on the counter. The gray-haired woman began to pull out little drawers and make change. One of the people in the hall opened the front door and they began filing out. I went with them, slow on their heels at first, then fast, dodging between them, then like a streak down the steps to the sidewalk and up the street.

It was an awful place to hide in—all lights and show windows; a fish might as well try to conceal itself in a parlor aquarium. There wasn't a niche that you could have squeezed a cat into and I *had* to get somewhere. Suddenly I saw a narrow flight of stairs with a large set of teeth hanging over them and up that I went, stumbling on my skirt till I reached a landing and flattened back against the dentist's door. It was locked or I would have gone in, so scared I was of that man—gone in, and if the price of concealment had been a set of false teeth I make no doubt I'd have ordered them.

After a while I ventured down, took a look out and stole away, dodging along dark side streets and round corners with my muff up against my face, till I struck a cab stand. Not a word came out of me till I was safe inside a taxi, and then I almost whispered my address to the chauffeur.



*It was locked or I would have gone in.*

As we sped along I quieted down and began to think—going over what he'd said, connecting things up. And as I thought, bouncing round in that empty vehicle like one small pea in a pod that was too big, I saw it plainer and plainer, as if one veil after another was being lifted. Harland was in love with her—she'd not gone down in the elevator—she'd stayed there! she'd been there! She'd—

We went over a chuck hole and I bounced up nearly to the roof, but the smothered cry that came from me wasn't because of that. It was because I *saw*—the whole thing was as clear as daylight. *She'd* been the lure that brought him to the Azalea Woods Estates, *she'd* been the person that kept him in the front office while Barker came down from the story above!





# CHAPTER XI

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

The account of Molly's dinner with Tony Ford was given Sunday morning by Molly herself to George and the chief in the Whitney home. I went there in the afternoon—dread of possible developments drew me like a magnet—and heard the news. It was more ominous than even I, steeled and primed for ill tidings, had expected. I didn't say much. There was no use in showing my disbelief; besides if they suspected its strength there was a possibility of their confidence being withheld from me. I had to hear everything, be familiar with every strand in the net they were weaving round the woman of whose guilt they were now certain.

George was going to call somewhere on Fifth Avenue, and I walked up with him, for the pleasure of his company he supposed, in reality to hear in detail how he and the chief had pieced into logical sequence the broken bits of information.

"Roughly speaking," he said, "it's this way: Barker was the brains of the combination, Ford and Miss Whitehall the instruments he used. Ford did the killing and was paid. Miss Whitehall's part, which was puzzling before, is now clear. She takes her place as The Woman in the Case, the spider that decoyed the fly into the web."

He paused for me to answer, but I could say nothing.

"It was one of the most ingenious plots I've ever come up against. A master mind conceived it and must have been days perfecting it. Think of the skill with which every detail was developed, and those two alibis—Ford's and Barker's. How carefully they were carried out. That afternoon visit of Harland to Miss Whitehall was planned. Barker followed it and heard that all was ready—the trap set and the quarry coming. Then he went up to the floor above establishing his presence there, and knowing, when Harland left, that the girl was waiting below to meet

and hold him in the front room.

"Then comes Tony Ford, finds Harland and Miss Whitehall, apologizes and goes through to the private office where Barker is lying low. That the murder was committed there is proved by the two blood spots. Ford established his alibi by leaving; Barker's is already established—he is in the room above unable to get out without being seen. Even if a crime *had* been discovered, they were both as safe from suspicion as if they'd been in their own homes.

"Miss Whitehall and Barker stay in the Azalea Woods Estates office till the excitement in the street subsides. They're perfectly safe there; the police, when they come, are going to go to the floor above. When the crowd disperses they leave by the service stairs, she first, Barker a short while afterward. The building and the street are deserted, but even if he *is* seen, nobody knows enough at that time to question his movements. After that it all goes without a hitch, even the arrest of the chauffeur was all to the good, as it delayed the search for two days.

"When it's known that he has voluntarily disappeared, what's the explanation? He's welched on his associates and found it best to take to the tall timber. At this moment he's probably congratulating himself on his success. There's just one thing that, so far, he hasn't been able to accomplish—get his girl."

I walked along, not answering. It was pretty sickening to hear how straight they had it. But there was one weak spot; at least I thought it was weak.

"Just why do you think a girl like Miss Whitehall—a woman without a spot or stain on her—would lend herself to an affair like that?"

"Perfectly simple," he answered. "She expects to marry Barker. Whether she loves him or his money, her actions prove that she is ready to join him whenever he sends for her—ready to do what he tells her. He's a tremendous personality, stronger than she, and he's bent her to his will."

"Oh, rot!" I said. "You can't bend a perfectly straight woman to help in such a crime unless she's bent that way by nature, and *she* isn't."

He grinned in a complacent, maddening way.

"I guess Barker could. He's as subtle as the serpent in Eden. Besides, how can you be so sure what kind of a girl she is? Who knows anything of these Whitehalls? They came from the West two years ago and settled on a farm—quiet, ladylike women—but not a soul has any real information about them or their antecedents. And *they* haven't given out much. They've been curiously secretive all along the line. I'm not saying the girl's a natural born criminal—she doesn't look the part—but you'll have to admit her speech and her actions are not those of a simple-minded rustic beauty. In my opinion she's fallen under Barker's spell, and he's molded her to his purpose. *He's* the one, *he's* the brain. She and Ford were

only the two hands."

We'd reached the place he was bound for, and I was glad to break away. I wanted to think, and the more I thought the more wild and fantastic and incredible it seemed. A week ago a girl like any other girl, and today suspected of complicity in a primitively savage crime. I thought of the case they were building up against her and I thought of her in her room that morning, and it seemed the maddest nightmare. Then her face that day in the Whitney office rose on my memory, the stealthily watching eyes with their leaping fires, the equivocations, the lies! I walked for the rest of the afternoon, miles, somewhere out in the country. My brain was dried like a sponge in the sun as I came home—I couldn't get anywhere, couldn't get beyond that fundamental conviction that it wasn't true. I think if she'd confessed it with her own lips I'd have gone on persisting she was innocent.

Two days after that a chain of events began that put an end to all inaction and plunged the Harland case deeper than ever into sinister mystery. I will write them down in the order in which they occurred.

The first was on Tuesday—the Tuesday night following Molly's dinner with Tony Ford. That night an unknown man attacked Ford in his room, leaving him for dead.

For some years Ford had lived in a lodging house on the East Side near Stuyvesant Park. The place was decent and quiet, run by a widow and her daughter, the inmates of a shabby-genteel class—rather an odd place for a man of Ford's proclivities to house himself. It was one of those old-fashioned, brown-stone fronts, set back from the street behind a little square of garden, a short flagged path leading to the front door.

On the evening of the attack Ford had come in about half-past eight, and, after a few words with his landlady, who was sitting in the reception room, had gone upstairs. A little after ten, as they were closing up for the night, there was a ring at the bell and the door was opened by the servant, a Swede. The widow was as economical with her gas as lodging-house keepers usually are, and the Swede said she could only dimly see the figure of a man in the vestibule. He asked for Mr. Anthony Ford, and she told him Mr. Ford was in and directed him to a room on the third floor back. Without more words he entered and went up the stairs. After locking the door she followed him, being on her way to bed. When she reached the third floor he was standing at Ford's door, and, as she ascended to the fourth, she heard his knock and Ford's voice from the inside call out, "Hello, who's that?"

When the police asked her about the man's appearance her description was meager. He had worn the collar of his overcoat turned up and kept on his hat. All that she could make out in the brief moment when he crossed the hall to the stairs

was that his eyes looked bright and dark, that he wore glasses, and that he had a large aquiline nose. She thought he had a white mustache, but on this point was uncertain, as the upturned collar hid the lower part of his face.

Babbitts, who reported the affair for the *Dispatch* and for the Whitney office on the side, questioned the girl carefully. She was stupid, not long landed, and could only be sure of the nose and the glasses. But one thing he elicited from her was an important touch in this impressionist picture—the man was small. When he passed her in the hall she noticed that he was not so tall as she was, and he moved quickly and lightly as he went up the stairs.

On the third floor front were two rooms, one vacant, one occupied by a boy named Salinger, a clerk in a near-by publishing house. Salinger came in at half-past ten, and as he passed Ford's door heard in the room men's voices, one loud, one low. A sentence in the raised voice—it did not sound like Ford's—caught his ear. The tone denoted anger, likewise the words: "I've come for something more than talk. I've had enough of that."

Knowing Ford was out of work he supposed he was having a row with a dun, and passed on to his own room, where he went to bed and read a novel. He was so engrossed in this that he said he would not have heard anyone come or go in the hall, but the landlady, who with her daughter occupied the parlor on the ground floor, at a little before eleven heard steps descending the stairs and the front door open and close.

It wasn't till nearly two in the morning that Salinger was wakened by a feeble knocking. He jumped up, and before he could reach the door heard a heavy fall in the passage. There, prostrate by the sill, lay Ford, unconscious, his head laid open by a deep wound.

Salinger dragged him back to his room, then roused the landlady, who sent for a doctor. He told Babbitts that the place gave no evidence of a struggle, the droplight was burning, a chair drawn close to it, and a book lying face down on the table as if Ford had been reading when the stranger interrupted him. On the floor near a desk standing between the two windows, a trickle of blood showed where Ford had fallen, suggesting that the attack had been made from behind as he stood over the desk. The doctor pronounced the injury serious. The blow had been delivered on the back of the head, and Ford's condition was critical.

When the police turned up they could find nothing to give them a clue to the assailant—no finger prints, no foot marks, no weapon or implement. Ford had been stricken down by one violent blow, falling on him suddenly and evidently unexpectedly. He was taken to the hospital, unconscious, no one knowing whether he would die before they could get a statement out of him.

The cause of the assault was at first puzzling. Robbery seemed improbable, as a man in Ford's position was not likely to have much money and as his gold watch and chain were found in full view on the table. But when the first excitement quieted down one of the women in the house came forward with the story that a few days before Ford had told her he had recently been left a legacy by an uncle up-state, and in proof of his newly acquired wealth had shown her two fifty-dollar bills. This put a different face on the matter. If Ford had carried such sums on him, it was probable the fact had become known and burglary been the motive of the attack.

The police looked over the papers in his wallet and desk but found nothing that threw any light on the mystery. Babbitts was present at this search and found three letters—tossed aside by the city detectives as having no bearing on the subject—that he knew must be seen by Whitney & Whitney. He and the precinct captain had hobnobbed together over many cases, and a few sentences in the hall resulted in the transfer of the papers to Babbitts' breast pocket with a promise to return them the next day.

I'll give you these letters later on—when we pored over them in the old man's private office.

In the hospital Ford came back to consciousness long enough to make an ante-mortem statement. It was short and explicit, satisfying the authorities, who didn't know that the victim himself was a criminal with matters in his own life to hide. Here it is, copied from the evening paper:

I don't know who the man was. I never saw him before. He had some story that he knew me and asked for money. I tried to stand him off, but when he got threatening, not wanting him to make a row in the house, I went to the desk where I had a few loose bills in a drawer. It was while I was standing there with my back to him, that he struck me. I don't know what he did it with—something he had under his coat. When I came to myself later I got to Salinger's door. That's all I know. A week ago I'd had some money on me—part of a small legacy—but I'd banked it a few days before. He must have heard of it some way and was after it.

That settled the question as far as the police and the general public went. That the watch and chain were not touched nor the few dollars in the desk drawer was pointed to as positive proof that Ford's assailant was no common sneak thief or second-story man. He was not wasting his time on small change or articles difficult to dispose of. For a few days the police hunted for him, but not a trace of

him was to be found. "An old hand," they had it, "dropped back into the darkness of the underworld."

There was not a detective or reporter in New York who connected that half-seen figure, stealing by night into a cheap lodging house, with the financier whose disappearance had been the nine days' wonder of the season.

On Wednesday evening Babbitts brought the letters to the Whitney office (we were all there but Molly), and we sat round the table passing the papers from hand to hand.

One was on a sheet of Harland's business stationery and was in Harland's writing, which both George and the chief knew. It was dated January second, and ran as follows:

DEAR FORD,

Excellent. If possible, I'll try to see you tomorrow. I'll be going down to lunch about one. Yours,

H. H.

As a document in the case it had no especial value, beyond confirming the fact that Ford was—as he had told Molly—on friendly terms with the lawyer.

The others were of vital significance. They were on small oblongs of white paper, the finely nicked upper edge indicating they had been attached to a writing tablet. Both were in ink, and in the same hand, rapid and scratchy, the words trailing off in unfinished scrawls. Neither had any address, but both bore dates: one December 27 and the other January 10.

Here is the first:

*December 27.*

DEAR GIRL,

Thanks for your note. Things begin to look more encouraging. That I must stand back and let you do so much—win our way by your cleverness and persuasion—is a trial to my patience. But my time will come later.

J. W. B.

The signature was a hurried scratch. Babbitts said the police had glanced at the letter, set it down as the copy of a note Ford had written to some girl, and thrown it aside. Those half-formed initials might have been anything to the casual, uninterested eye.

The second, dated January 10, was a little longer:

DEAREST,

I hoped to see you today but couldn't make it. So our end seems to be in sight—at last approaching after our planning and waiting. What a sensation we're going to make! But it won't touch us. We're strong enough to dare anything when our happiness is the stake.

J. W. B.

We agreed with O'Mally when he sized these letters up as copies in Ford's hand—he had samples of it—of notes written by Barker to Carol Whitehall. The reason for Ford's taking them was not hard to guess with our knowledge of the gunman's character.

"It shows him up as a pretty tough specimen," said the detective, astride on a chair with a big black cigar in the corner of his mouth. "He wasn't going to lose a trick. While he was working for Barker he was gathering all the evidence against his employer that his position in the Whitehall office gave him access to."

"Laying his plans for blackmail," said George.

"That's it. He had his eagle eye trained on the future. When Barker and his girl were feeling safe in some secluded corner, these letters—documentary testimony to the plot—could be used as levers to extort more money."

"Do you suppose Barker was on to it and decided to get him out of the way before he had a chance to use them?" said Babbitts.

"No—I don't see it that way. There was no indication in the room of a search. I guess Barker acted on the principle that the fewer people share a secret the easier it is to keep."

"Looks to me," said George, "as if Ford *had* made some move that scared the old man. Coming back that way into a house full of people! Considering the circumstances he took a mighty big risk."

"Not as big a one as having Ford at large," answered O'Mally. "You've got to remember that not one of the three knows the murder has been discovered. They think they're as safe as bugs in a rug. With Ford out of it the only menace to Barker's safety is removed. I look at this as a last perfecting touch, the coping stone on the edifice."

The chief, who had been silently pacing back and forth across the end of the room, came slouching to the table and picked up the longer of the two letters. Holding it to the light he read it over murmuringly, then dropped it and said:

"Curious that a man who had conceived such a plot would allude to it in writing."

I spoke up. What seemed to me the first rational words of the meeting gave me my cue.

"What makes you so sure the thing alluded to in those letters *is* the murder?"

I was standing back between the window and the table. They all squared round in their chairs to stare at me, O'Mally bending his head to level a scornful glance below the shade of the electric standard.

"What else *could* they allude to?" he said.

"I don't know. Nobody, not a person here, knows all that existed between Barker and Miss Whitehall. There's no reason to take for granted that the plan, scheme, whatever you like to call it those letters indicate, was the killing of Harland."

O'Mally gave an exasperated grunt and cast an eye of derisive question at the chief. It enraged me and my hands gripped together.

"Oh, Lord, Jack, you're nutty," said George. "We know Barker and Miss Whitehall were in love, and we know Barker committed the murder, and we know she helped. That was enough to occupy their minds without going off on side mysteries."

Nature has cursed me with a violent temper. During the last two years—since the dark days of the Hesketh tragedy—I've thought it was conquered—a leashed beast of which I was the master. Now suddenly it rose, pulling at its chain. I felt the old forgotten stir of it, the rush of boiling blood that in the end made me blind. I had sense enough left to know I'd got to keep it down and I did it. But if there'd been no need for restraint, for dissimulation, it would have burst out as it has in the past, burst against O'Mally with a fist in the middle of his cock-sure, sneering face. I heard my voice, husky, but steady, as I said,

"That's all very well, but how about what the chief has just said? Why should Barker *write* when he could say what he wanted? Why did he, so cautious in every other way, do a thing a green boy would have known the danger of? You're building up your whole case on the vaguest surmises."

O'Mally took his cigar out of his mouth, his eyes narrowed and full of an ugly fire.

"I suppose the initial fact that a murder's been committed is surmise?"

"No," I came nearer the table, the blood singing in my ears, "it's your evidence against the woman, that you're twisting and coloring to match your preconceived theories. There's not an attempt been made to reconcile her previous record with the villainous act of which you accuse her. There's a gulf there you can't bridge. Why don't you go down into the foundations of the thing instead of putting your attention on surface indications? Why don't you go into the psychology of it, build on that, not the material facts that a child could see?"



I don't believe one of them guessed the state I was in—took my vehemence as an enthusiasm for impartial justice. But a few minutes more of it and the old fury would have broken loose. I saw O'Mally's face, red through a red mist, saw he was mad, mad straight through, enraged at the aspersions on his ability. He got up, ready to answer, and Lord knows what would have happened—a rough and tumble round the room probably—if the door hadn't opened and a clerk put in his head with the announcement:

"A gentleman on the phone wants Mr. O'Mally."

The words transformed the detective; his anger vanished as if it never had been. Quick as a wink he made for the door, flinging back over his shoulder:

"I told them at the office if anything turned up I'd be here. There's something doing."

A hush fell on the rest of us, the tense quiet of expectancy. The fire in me died like a flame when a bellows is dropped. News—any news—might bring help for her, exonerate her, wipe away the stain of the suspicions that no one but we six would ever know.

The door opened and O'Mally entered. His face was illuminated, shining with an irrepressible triumph, his movements quick and instinctively stealthy. Pushing the door to behind him he said as softly as if the walls had ears:

"They've got Barker in Philadelphia."



# CHAPTER XII

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

Inside an hour O'Mally, Babbitts and I were on our way to Philadelphia. All friction was forgotten, a bigger issue had extinguished the sparks that had come near bursting into flame. A mutual desire united us, the finding of Barker.

The train, an express, seemed to crawl like a tortoise, but the way I felt I guess the flight of an aëroplane would have been slow. I had hideous fears that he might give us the slip, but O'Mally was confident. One of his men had got a lead on Barker through a vendor of newspapers, from whom the capitalist twice in the last week had purchased the big New York dailies. It had taken several days to locate his place of hiding—a quiet boarding house far removed from the center of the city—which was now under surveillance. As we swung through the night, shut close in a smoke-filled compartment, we speculated as to whether he would try and throw a bluff or see the game was up and tell the truth.

At the station O'Mally's man met us and the four of us piled into a taxi, and started on a run across town. It was moonlight, and going down those quiet streets, lined with big houses and then with little houses—still, dwindling vistas sleeping in the silver radiance—seemed to me the longest drive I'd ever taken in my life. As we sped the detective gave us further particulars. By his instructions the newsstand man, who left the morning papers at the boarding house, had got into communication with the servant, a colored girl. From her he had learnt that Barker—he passed under the name of Joseph Sammis—had been away for twenty-four hours and had come back that morning so ill that a doctor had been called in. The doctor had said the man's heart was weak, and that his condition looked like the result of strain or shock. Questioned further the girl had said he was "A pleasant, civil-spoken old gentleman, giving no trouble to anybody." He went out

very little, sitting in his room most of the time reading the papers. He received no mail there, but that he did get letters she had found out, as she had seen one on his table addressed to the General Delivery.

The house was on a street, quiet and deserted at this early hour, one of a row all built alike. As we climbed out of the taxi the moon was bright, the shadows lying like black velvet across the lonely roadway. On the opposite side, loitering slow, was a man, who, raising a hand to his hat, passed on into the darkness along the area railings. Though it was only a little after nine, many of the houses showed the blankness of unlit windows, but in the place where we had stopped a fan-light over the door glowed in a yellow semicircle.

As the taxi moved off we three—O'Mally's detective slipped away into the shadow like a ghost—walked up a little path to the front door where I pulled an old-fashioned bell handle. I could hear the sound go jingling through the hall, loud and cracked, and then steps, languid and dragging, come from somewhere in the rear. I was to act as spokesman, my cue being to ask for Mr. Sammis on a matter of urgent business.

The door was opened by the colored girl, who looked at us stupidly and then said she'd call Miss Graves, the landlady, as she didn't think anyone could see Mr. Sammis.

Standing back from the door she let us into a hall with a hatrack on one side and a flight of stairs going up at the back. The light was dim, coming from a globe held aloft by a figure that crowned the newel post. The paper on the walls, some dark striped pattern, seemed to absorb what little radiance there was and the whole place smelled musty and was as quiet as a church.

The colored girl had disappeared down a long passage and presently a door opened back there and a woman came out, tall and thin, in a skimpy black dress. She approached us as we stood in a group by the hatrack, leaning forward near-sightedly and blinking at us through silver-rimmed spectacles.

"My maid says you want to see Mr. Sammis," she said, in an unamiable voice.

"Yes," I answered. "We've come from New York and it's imperative we see him this evening."

"But you can't," she snapped. "He's sick. The doctor says he mustn't be disturbed."

Talking it over afterward we all confessed that we were seized by the same idea—that this lanky old spinster might be in the game and Barker's illness was a fake. Feeling as I did I was ready to leap forward, grab her, and lock her in her own parlor while the others chased up the stairs. I could sense the slight, uneasy stir of the two men beside me, and I tried to inject a determination into my voice,

that while it was civil was also informing:

"I'm sorry, but it's absolutely necessary that we transact our business with him now."

"Can't you give me a message?" she demurred, squinting her eyes up behind the glasses. "I'll see that it's delivered in the morning."

"No, Madam. This is important and can't wait. We won't be long, we only have to consult with him for a few minutes."

She gave a shrug as much as to say, "Well, this is your affair!" and, drawing back, pointed to the stairs.

"He's up there, fourth floor front, second door to your left."

To each of us the suspicion that she was in with Barker had grown with every minute. The idea once lodged in our minds, possessed them, and we went up those stairs, slow at first, and then, as we got out of earshot, faster and faster. It was a run on the second flight and a gallop on the third. On this landing there was no gas lit, but a window at the end of the passage let in a square of moonlight that lay bright on the floor and showed us the hall's dim length and the outlines of closed doors.

It was the second of these, on the left-hand side, and creeping toward it we stood for a moment getting our wind. The place was very cold, as if a window was open, and there was not a sound. Standing by the door O'Mally knocked softly. There was no answer.

In that half-lit passage, chilled with the icy breath of the winter night and held in a strange stillness, I was seized by a grisly sense of impending horror. If I'd been a small boy my teeth would have begun to chatter. At thirty years of age that doesn't happen, but I doubt whether anyone whose body was supplied with an ordinarily active nervous system would not have felt something sinister in that cold, dark place, in the silence behind that close-shut door.

O'Mally knocked again and again; there was no answer.

"Try it," I whispered and the detective turned the handle.

"Locked," he breathed back, then—"Stand away there. I'm going to break it. There's something wrong here."

He turned sideways, bracing his shoulder against the door. There was a cracking sound, and the lock, embedded in old soft wood, gave way, the door swinging in with O'Mally hanging to the handle.

The room was unlit but for the silver moonlight that came from the window, uncurtained and open. At that sight the same thought seized the three of us—the man was gone—and O'Mally, fumbling in his pocket for matches, broke into furious profanity.

I had a box and as I dug round for it, took a look about, and saw the shapes of a chair with garments hanging over it, an open desk, and, against the opposite wall, the bed. It was only a pale oblong, and looked irregular, as if the clothes were heaped on it as the man had thrown them back. I could have joined O'Mally in his swearing. Gone—when our fingers were closing on him! Then I found the matches and the gas burst out over our heads.

My eyes were on the bed and O'Mally's must have been, for simultaneously I gave an exclamation and he leaped forward. There, asleep, under the covers lay a man. Quick as a flash of lightning the detective was beside him, bending to look close at the face, then he drew back with a sound—a cry of amazement, disbelief—and pulling off the bed clothes laid his hand on the sleeper's chest.

"God in Heaven!" he gasped, turning to us. "He's dead!"

Babbitts and I made a rush for the bed, I to the head, where I leaned low to make sure, staring into the gray, pale face with its prominent nose and sunken eyes. Then it was my turn to cry out, to stagger back, looking from one man to the other, aghast at what I'd seen:

"It's not Barker at all."

For a moment we stared at one another, jaws fallen, eyes stony. Not a word came from one of us, the silence broken by the hissing rush of the gas turned up full cock in a sputtering ribbon of flame. I came to myself first, turned from them back to the dead face, its marble calm in strange contrast to the stunned consternation of the living faces.

"It's not he," I repeated. "I've often seen him. It's *not* the man."

"Well—well——" stammered O'Mally, coming out of his stupor. "Who on earth is it?"

"How do I know—Sammis, I suppose. It's like him—the nose, the eyes and the eyebrows, and the mustache. But," I looked at them, gazing like two stupefied animals at the head on the pillow, "it's *not* Johnston Barker."

O'Mally, with a groan of baffled desperation, fell into a chair, his hands hanging over the arms, his feet limp on the floor before him. Babbitts stood paralyzed, leaning on the foot of the bed. It was an extraordinary situation—three live men, hot on the chase of a fourth and in the moment of victory faced by the most inscrutable and solemn thing that life holds—a dead man. We couldn't get over it, couldn't seem to think or act, grouped round the bed with the whistling rush of the gas loud on the silence.

Then suddenly, another and more distant sound broke up our stupefaction. Someone was coming up the stairs. It jerked us back to life, and I made a run for the door, O'Mally's whisper hissing after me:

"If it's that woman, keep her away for a while. I want to go over the room."

It was Miss Graves, ascending slowly with the help of the balustrade. I caught her on the landing and told her what we'd found. She was not greatly surprised—the doctor had warned her. I explained the broken door by telling her we had been alarmed by the silence and had forced our way in. That, too, she took quietly, and turned away, gliding shadowlike down the stairs to send out the servant for the doctor.

When I reëntered the room its aspect was changed. A sheet covered the dead man and O'Mally and Babbitts, with all the burners in the chandelier blazing, had started looking over the room. The detective was already at work on the papers in the desk, Babbitts going through the clothes over the chair and the few others that hung in the cupboard.

"Hustle and get busy," said O'Mally, as he heard me come in. "If this isn't Johnston Barker, it's the man we've been trailing and I'm pretty sure it's the one that attacked Ford."

There was a table by the bedside with a reading lamp and some books on it. Moving these I came upon two newspaper clippings, relating to the suicide of Harland. In both Anthony Ford was mentioned. The reporters had evidently spoken to him that night on the street, gleaned any fragments of information they could. One alluded to the fact that he was employed in the offices below Harland's, the Azalea Woods Estates. These words were heavily underlined in pencil.

"Looks like it from this," I said, showing the clipping to O'Mally.

He glanced at it and grunted, going back to his inspection of a sheaf of papers he had found in one of the desk pigeonholes.

Meantime Babbitts had found in the coat that hung over the chair a wallet containing a hundred dollars, a tailor's bill for a suit and coat, receipted and bearing a New York address, and Tony Ford's house and street number written in pencil on a neatly folded sheet of note paper. Besides these there was one letter, dated January 13, typed and bearing no signature. Its contents was as follows:

Enclosed please find one hundred dollars in two bills of fifty. Will send same amount on same date next month if work should be still delayed. Will communicate further later.

The envelope, also addressed in typewriting, was directed to Joseph Sammis, General Delivery, Philadelphia, and bore a New York postmark.

We were working too quickly for much comment, but Babbitts held out the paper with Ford's address on it toward O'Mally.

"This bears it out, too," he said.

O'Mally looked at it, and snapped the elastic back on the documents he'd been going over.

"From what I've seen here," he said, "Sammis was the man Ford was with in the real-estate business. These are all contracts, bills and some correspondence, the records of a small venture that went to smash," he pushed the roll back in its pigeonhole—"not another thing."

"There's not another thing in the room," I answered, "except two novels and a stack of New York papers on the floor there by the bureau. Hist! quiet!"

There were feet coming up the stairs. In a twinkling everything was as it had been, Babbitts and O'Mally withdrew to the window and I went out to see who was coming. It was Miss Graves and the doctor.

I explained the situation and found the doctor brusquely business-like and matter-of-fact. It was what might have been expected. When he had been called in that morning he had found Mr. Sammis a very sick man, suffering from angina pectoris and a general condition of debility and exhaustion. He had asked him if he had been subjected to any recent exertion or strain but been told no other than a trip the day before to Washington. Miss Graves said it was undoubtedly this trip that had done the damage. He had been well when he started on Tuesday morning, but on returning twenty-four hours later had been so weak and enfeebled that one of the other lodgers had had to assist him to his room. An examination proved that he had been dead some hours. Who his relations were or where he came from Miss Graves had no idea and would turn the matter over to the authorities.

It was close on midnight when we left, and there being no vehicle in sight we walked up the street. The moon was as bright as day, and, swinging along between those two lines of black houses, with here and there a light shining yellow in an upper window, we were silent, each occupied by his own thoughts.

I could guess those of the other two—Babbitts' chagrin at once again losing his big story, O'Mally's sullen indignation at having followed a clue that led to such a blind alley. But their disappointment and bitterness were nothing to mine. All my hopes gone again, and this last puzzle helping in no way, in no way as I then counted help.



# CHAPTER XIII

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

To say that the expectant Whitney office got a jolt is putting it mildly. On the threshold of success, to meet such a setback enraged George and made even the chief grouchy. The new developments added new complications that upset their carefully elaborated theories. There had to be a readjustment. Whoever Sammis was and whatever his motive could have been it was undoubtedly he who had attacked Tony Ford.

It was inexplicable and mysterious. The chief had an idea that there was a connection between Sammis and Barker, that the man now dead might have been "planted" in Philadelphia to divert the search from the live man, who had stolen to safety after a rise to the surface in Toronto. George scouted it; an accidental likeness had fooled them and made them waste valuable time. The devil was on the side of Barker, taking care of his own.

It did look that way. Investigation of the few clues we had led to nothing. The tailor, whose bill was found in Sammis's pocket, remembered selling a suit and overcoat to a man called Sammis on January tenth. He was a quiet, polite old party who looked poor and shabby but bought good clothes and paid spot cash for them. The typewritten letter indicated that Sammis had been sent to Philadelphia and well paid for some work that had not yet started. It was upon this letter the chief based his contention that Sammis's appearance in the case was not a coincidence—he was another of Barker's henchmen, and it was part of Barker's luck that at the crucial moment he should have died.

But it was all speculation, nothing certain except that we had lost our man again. Philadelphia had dropped out as a point of interest and the case swung back to New York, where it now centered round the bed of Tony Ford.

We were in constant communication with the hospital and on Thursday received word that Ford would recover. That lifted us up from the smash of Wednesday night. When he was able to speak we would hear something—everything if he could be scared into a full confession. The hospital authorities refused to let anyone see him till he was perfectly fit, a matter of several days yet. That suited us, as we wanted no speech with him till he was strong enough to stand the shock of our knowledge. Caught thus, with his back against the wall, we expected him to make a clean breast of it.

The enforced waiting was—to me anyway—distracting. With the hope I'd had of Barker gone, I was now looking to Ford. He *must*, he *could* exonerate her, there wasn't the slightest doubt of it. But to have to wait for it, to be cool and calm, to get through the next few days—I felt like a man caught in the rafters of a burning building, trying to be patient while they hacked him out.

After the news from the hospital the temperature of the office fell to an enforced normal. O'Mally went back to his burrow and Babbitts to his paper with his big story still in the air. That night in my place, I measured off the sitting room from eight till twelve—five strides from the bookcase to the window, seven from the fire to the folding doors.

If I could only induce her to speak, if she herself would only clear up the points that were against her, there was still a chance of getting her out of it before Ford opened up. That she had something to hide, some mystery in connection with her movements that night, some secret understanding with Barker, even I had to admit. But whatever it was it would be better to reveal it than to go on into the fierce white light that would break over the Harland case within a week.

In that midnight pacing I tried to think of some way I could force her to tell—to tell *me*, but the clocks chimed on and the fire died on the hearth and I got nowhere. She knew me so slightly, might think I was set on by the office, the very fact that I was what I was might seal her lips closer. Instead of breaking down her reticence I might increase it, strengthen that wall of secretiveness behind which she seemed to be taking refuge like a hunted creature.

When I went to the office on Friday morning the chief asked me to go to Buffalo that night, to look up some witnesses in the Lytton case. It would take me all Saturday and I could get back by Sunday night or at the latest Monday morning. A phone message sent to the hospital before I came in had drawn the information that Tony Ford would not be able to see the Philadelphia detectives—O'Mally and Babbitts posed in that rôle—till Monday. That settled it—better to be at work out of town than hanging about cursing the slowness of the hours.

But the questions of the night before haunted me. Why, anyway, couldn't I go to see her? Wasn't it up to me, whether I succeeded or not, to make the effort to break through her silence—the silence that was liable to do her such deadly damage? I *had* to see her. I couldn't keep away from her. At lunch time I called her up and asked her if I could come. She said yes and named four that afternoon. On the stroke I was in the vestibule, pushing the button below her name, and with my heart thumping against my ribs like a steel hammer.

She opened the door and as I followed her up the little hall told me the servant had been sent away and her mother was out. As on that former visit she seated herself at the desk, motioning me to a chair opposite. The blinds were raised, the room flooded with the last warm light of the afternoon. By its brightness I saw that she was even paler and more worn than she had been that other time—obviously a woman harassed and preyed upon by some inner trouble.

On the way up I had gone over ways of approach, but sitting there in the quiet pretty room, so plainly the abode of gentlewomen, I couldn't work round to the subject. She didn't give me any help, seeming to assume that I had dropped in to pay a call. That made it more difficult. When a woman treats you as if you're a gentleman, actuated by motives of common politeness, it's pretty hard to break through her guard and pry into her secrets.

She began to talk quickly and, it seemed to me, nervously, telling me how the owner of their old farm on the Azalea Woods Estates had offered them a cottage there, to which they would move next week. It was small but comfortable, originally occupied by a laborer's family who had gone away. The people were very kind, would take no rent, and she and her mother could live for almost nothing till she found work. I sympathized with the idea, she'd get away from the wear and tear of the city, have time to rest and recuperate after her recent worry. She dropped her eyes to a paper on the desk and said:

"Yes, I'm tired. Everything was so sudden and unexpected. I once thought I was strong enough to stand anything—but all this—"

She stopped and picking up a pencil began making little drawings on the paper, designs of squares and circles.

"It's worn you out," I said, looking at her weary and colorless face. Like the thrust of a sword a pang shot through me—love of a man, hidden and disgraced, had blighted that once blooming beauty.

She nodded without looking up:

"It's not the business only, there have been other—other—anxieties."

That was more of an opening than anything I'd ever heard her say. I could feel the smothering beat of my heart as I answered, as quietly as I could:

"Can't you tell them to me? Perhaps I can help you."

One of those sudden waves of color I'd seen before passed across her face. As if to hide it she dropped her head lower over the paper, touching up the marks she was making. Her voice came soft and controlled:

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Reddy—But I know you're kind—I knew it when I first met you a year ago in the country. No, I can't tell you."

I leaned nearer to her. If I had a chance to make her speak it was now or never.

"Miss Whitehall," I said, trying to inject a simple, casual friendliness into my voice. "You're almost alone in the world, you've no one—no man, I mean—to look after you or your interests. You don't know how much help I might be able to give you."

"In what way?" she asked, with her eyes still on the paper.

For a moment I was nonplused. I couldn't tell her what I knew—I couldn't go back on my office. I was tied hand and foot; all I could do with honesty was to try to force the truth from her. Like a fool I stammered out:

"In advice—in—in—a larger knowledge of the world than you can have."

She gave a slight, bitter smile, and tilting her head backward looked critically at her drawings:

"My knowledge of the world is larger than you think—maybe larger than yours. There's only one thing you can do for me, but there is one."

I leaned nearer, my voice gone a little hoarse:

"What is it?"

She turned her head and looked into my eyes. Her expression chilled me, cold, challenging, defiant:

"Tell me if the Whitney Office has found Johnston Barker yet?"

For a second our eyes held, and in that second I saw the defiance die out of hers and only question, a desperate question, take its place.

"No," I heard myself say, "they have *not* found him."

"Thank you," she murmured, and went back to her play with the pencil.

I drew myself to the edge of my chair and laid a hand on the corner of the desk:

"You've asked me a question and I've answered it. Now let *me* ask one. Why are you so interested in the movements of Johnston Barker?"

She stiffened, I could see her body grow rigid under its thin silk covering. The hand holding the pencil began to tremble:

"Wouldn't anyone be interested in such a sensational event? Isn't it natural? Perhaps knowing Mr. Barker personally—as I told you in Mr. Whitney's

office—I'm more curious than the rest of the world, that's all."

The trembling of her hand made it impossible for her to continue drawing. She threw down the pencil and locked her fingers together, outstretched on the paper, a breath, deep taken and sudden, lifting her breast. It was pitiful, her lonely fight. I was going to say something—anything, to make her think I didn't see, when she spoke again:

"Do any of you—you men who are hunting him—ever think that he may not be *able* to come back?"

"Able?" I exclaimed excitedly, for now again I thought something was coming. "What do you mean by able?"

I had said—or looked—too much. With a smothered sound she jumped to her feet and before I could rise or stay her with a gesture, brushed past me and moved to the window. There, for a moment, she stood looking out, her splendid shape, crowned with its mass of black hair, in silhouette against the thin white curtains.

"Look here, Miss Whitehall," I said with grim resolution, "I've got to say something to you that you may not like, may think is butting in, but I can't help it."

"What?" came on a caught breath.

"If you know anything about Barker—his whereabouts, his inability to come back—why don't you tell it? It will help us and help you."

She wheeled round like a flash, all vehement denial.

"I—I? I didn't mean that I *knew*. I was only wondering, guessing. It's just as I told Mr. Whitney that day. And you seem to think I'm not open, am hiding something. Why should I do that? What motive could I have to keep secret anything I might know that would bring Mr. Barker to justice?"

As she spoke she moved toward me, bringing up in front of me, her eyes almost fiercely demanding. Mine fell before them. It was no use. With my memory of those letters, of her mysterious plot with Barker clear in my mind, I could go no farther.

I muttered some sentences of apology, was sorry if I'd offended her, hadn't meant to imply anything, was carried away by my zeal to find the absconder. She seemed mollified and moved to her seat by the desk. Then suddenly, as if a spring that had upheld her had snapped, she dropped into the chair, limp and pallid.

"I'm tired, I'm not myself," she faltered. "I don't seem to know what I'm saying. All this—all these dreadful things—have torn me to pieces—" Her voice broke and she averted her face but not before I'd seen that her eyes were shining with tears. That sight brought a passionate exclamation out of me. I went toward

her, my arms ready to go out and enfold her. But she waved me back with an imploring gesture:

"Oh go—I beg of you, go—I want peace—I want to be alone. Please go—Please don't torment me any more. I can't bear it."

She dropped her face into her hands, shrinking back from me, and I turned and left her. My steps as I went down the hall were the only sounds in the place, but the silence seemed to thrill with unloosed emotions, to hum and sing with the vibrations that came from my nerves and my heart and my soul.

The big moments in your life ought to come in beautiful places, at least that's what I've always thought. But they don't—anyway with me. For as I went down that dingy staircase, full of queer smells, dark and squalid, the greatest moment I'd ever known came to me—I loved her!

I'd loved her always—I knew it now. Out in the country those few first times, but then more as a vision, something that wove through my thoughts, aloof and unapproachable, like an inspiration and a dream. And that day in Whitney's office as a woman. And every day since, deeper and stronger, seeing her beset, realizing her danger, longing with every fiber to help her. It was the cause of that burst of the old fury, of the instinct that kept me close and secretive, of this day's fruitless attempt to make her speak. All the work, the growing dread, the rush of events, had held me from seeing, crowded out recognition of the wonderful thing. I stood in the half-lit, musty little hall in a trance-like ecstasy, outside myself, holding only that one thought—I loved her—I loved her—I loved her!

Presently I was in the street, walking without any consciousness of the way, toward the Park. The ecstasy was gone, the present was back again—the present blacker and more terrible after those radiant moments. I don't know how to describe that coming back to the hideous reality. Everything was mixed up in me—passion, pity, hope, jealousy. There was a space when that was the fiercest, gripped me like a physical pang, and then passed into a hate for Barker, the man she loved who had left her to face it alone. I think I must have spoken aloud—I saw people looking at me, and if my inner state was in any way indicated on my outer envelope I wonder I wasn't run in as a lunatic.

In a quiet bypath in the Park I got a better hold on myself and tried to do some clear thinking. The first thing I had to do was to rule Barker out. Even if my fight was to give her to him I must fight; that I couldn't do till we heard from Ford. Until then it was wisdom to say nothing, to keep my pose of a disinterested adherent of the theory of her innocence. If Ford's story exculpated her she was out of the case forever. If it didn't I couldn't decide what I'd do till I heard where it placed her.

It was a momentary deadlock with nothing for it but to wait. That I was prepared to do—go to Buffalo, get through my job there and come back. But I'd come back with my sword loose in its scabbard to do battle for my lady.





# CHAPTER XIV

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

You can imagine after that disappointment in Philadelphia—it seems an unfeeling way to speak of the death of an old gentleman—how we all turned our eyes and kept them fixed on Tony Ford.

Friday night Babbitts told me the hospital had reported he couldn't be seen till Monday. The others were in a fever, he said, O'Mally smoking big black cigars by the gross and Jack Reddy gone off to Buffalo, and Mr. George that scared Ford would slip off some way he'd have liked to put a cordon of the National Guard round the hospital.

Then came Saturday—and Gee! up everything burst different to what anybody had expected.

It started with Mr. George. Being so nervous he couldn't rest he called up the hospital in the morning and got word that there'd been a mistake in the message of the day before and that Mr. Ford was well enough to see the Philadelphia detectives that afternoon. Before midday Babbitts and O'Mally were gathered in, and while I was waiting on pins and needles in Ninety-fifth Street and Jack Reddy was off unsuspecting in Buffalo, the two of them were planted by Tony Ford's bedside, hearing the story that lifted the Harland case one peg higher in its surprise and grewsomeness.

O'Mally and Babbitts had their plans all laid beforehand. They were two plain-clothes men from Philadelphia, who had just come on a new lead—the finding of Sammis. When they'd opened that up before him, they were going to pass on to the murder—take him by surprise. If Ford made the confession they hoped to shake out of him, the warrant for his arrest would be issued and the Harland case come before the public in its true light.

Babbitts had never seen Ford and when he described him to me it didn't sound like the same man. He was lying propped up with pillows, his head swathed in bandages, and his face pale and haggard. Under the covers his long legs stretched most to the end of the cot, and his big, powerful hands were lying limp on the counterpane. He was in a private room, in an inside wing of the hospital, very quiet and retired.

When the attendant left and they introduced themselves he looked sort of scowling from one to the other. Both noticed the same thing—a kind of uneasiness, as if his apprehensions were aroused, and for all his broken head he was on the job, not weak and indifferent, but wary and alert.

This wasn't what they wanted so they started in telling him the news they thought would please him and put him at his ease. A clue had been picked up in Philadelphia that looked like the mystery of his attack was solved.

"In fact," says O'Mally, "a man's been run to earth there that we're pretty sure is the one."

Both men were watching him and both saw a change come over him that caught their eyes and held them. Instead of being relieved he was scared.

"Have you got the man?" he said.

O'Mally nodded:

"That's what we have."

"Who is he?"

"Party called Sammis. Answers to the description——"

Before he could go further Ford raised himself on his elbow, looking downright terrified.

"Joseph Sammis?" he said, his eyes set staring on O'Mally.

"That's it. We tracked him up and found him. But I don't want to raise any false hopes. We were too late. When we got there he was dead."

It had an extraordinary effect upon Ford. He gave a gasp, and raised himself up into a sitting posture, his mouth open, his eyes glued on O'Mally. For a minute not one of them said a word—Ford evidently too paralyzed at what he'd heard, and the others too surprised at the way Ford was acting which was exactly different to what they'd expected. It was he who spoke first, his voice gone down to a husky murmur:

"Dead?"

O'Mally answered:

"Heart disease, angina pectoris. The doctor down there said some strain or effort had finished him. That, as we see it, was the attack he made on you."

Then Ford did the most surprising thing of all. Raising his hands he clapped both over his face, and with a big, heaving sob from the bottom of his chest, fell back on the pillows and began to cry.

Babbitts said you couldn't have believed it if you hadn't seen it—he and O'Mally looking stumped at each other and between them that great ox of a man, lying in the bed crying like a baby. Then Himself, being fearful that maybe they'd done the man harm, rose up to go after a nurse, but O'Mally caught him by the coat, whispering, "Keep still, you goat," then turned and said very pleasant to Ford:

"Knocked you out, old man. That's natural, nerves still weak. Keep it up till you feel better. Don't mind us—we're used to it."

So there they sat, Babbitts still uneasy, but O'Mally, calm and patient, tilting back in his chair looking dreamy out of the window. He said afterward that he knew that hysterical fit for what it was—relief, and that was why he wouldn't let Babbitts call a nurse.

Presently the sobs began to ease off and Ford, groping under the pillow for a handkerchief, said, all choked up:

"How did you come to connect him with me?"

"By papers found in his desk—records of a real-estate business you and he'd been in some years ago at Syracuse."

"That's the man," said Ford, between his hiccuppy catches of breath, "and he's dead?"

"Dead as Julius Cæsar." O'Mally leaned forward, his voice dropping, "You *knew* he was the chap that attacked you?"

Ford, his head drooped, his shoulders hunched up like an old woman's, nodded:

"Yes, I lied when I said he was a stranger to me."

"Why did you do that?" asked Babbitts.

It was just what you might know he'd ask. One of the cutest things about Himself is that he never can understand why anyone, no matter what the provocation, has to lie.

Ford didn't answer and O'Mally, giving his chair a hitch nearer to the bed, said kind and persuasive:

"Say, Ford, you'd better tell us all you know. We got the papers, and most of the information. The man's dead. Clean it up and we'll let it drop."

Without raising his head Ford said, low and sort of sullen:

"All right—if you agree to that. I was in business with him and I—I—didn't play fair—lit out with some of the money." He turned a lowering look on Babbitts. "That's the answer to your question," then back to O'Mally, "I didn't run across

him or hear of him in all this time and supposed the whole thing was buried and forgotten till he came into my room Tuesday night. He was blazing mad, said he'd been waiting for a chance to even up, and had at last found me. To keep him quiet I said I'd give him some money. I had some."

"Yes, yes," said O'Mally, nodding cheerfully, "the legacy your uncle left you."

Ford shot a look at him, sharp and quick:

"Oh, you know about that?"

"Naturally. Inquiries have been made in all directions. Go on."

"I hadn't much cash there—a few dollars, but I thought I'd hand him that and agree to pay him more later. He said he didn't want money, *that* wouldn't square our accounts, and as I went to the desk he came up behind me and struck me. That's all I know."

"Did he say how he'd located you?"

"Yes. He'd been looking for me ever since I'd skipped but couldn't find me. Then he saw my name in the papers after the Harland suicide. Some fool reporter spoke to me in the street that night and I told him who I was and where I worked. A short while after Sammis phoned up to the Black Eagle Building, heard from Miss Whitehall I'd left and got from her my house address."

"Did he say what he was doing in Philadelphia?"

"He had some new job there, he didn't say what, but he said he was well paid. That came out in his blustering about not wanting my money."

There was a pause, Babbitts and O'Mally scribbling in their note books, Ford sitting up in that hunched position, looking surly at his hands lying on the counterpane. So far every word he'd said tallied with what they already knew. Babbitts was wondering how O'Mally was going to get round to the real business of the interview, when the detective suddenly raised up from his notes, and leaning forward tapped lightly on one of Ford's hands with the point of his pencil.

"Say, Ford, how about that legacy from your uncle?"

Ford gave a start, stiffened up and looked quick as a flash into the detective's face.

"What about it?" he stammered.

O'Mally, his body bending forward, his pencil tip still on Ford's hand, said with sudden, grim meaning:

"We know where it came from."

For a second they eyed each other. Babbitts said it looked like an electric current was passing between them, holding them as still as if they were mesmerized. Then O'Mally went on, very low, each word falling slow and clear from his lips:

"We know all about that money and the game you've been playing. This Sammis business isn't what we're here for. It's the other—the Harland matter, the thing that's been occupying your time and thoughts lately. That outside job of yours—that job that was finished on the night of January the fifteenth." He paused and Ford's glance slid away from him, his eyes like the eyes of a trapped animal traveling round the walls of the room. "We've got you, Ford. The whole thing's in our hands. Your only chance is to tell—tell everything you know."

In describing it to me Babbitts said that moment was one of the tensest in the whole case. Ford was cornered, you could see he knew it and you could see the consciousness of guilt in his pallid face and trembling hands. O'Mally was like a hunter that has his prey at last in sight, drawn forward to the edge of his chair, his jaw squared, his eyes piercing into Ford like gimlets.

"Go ahead," he almost whispered. "What was that money paid you for?"

Ford tried to smile, the ghost of that cock-sure grin distorting his face like a grimace.

"I guess you've got the goods on me," he said. "I know when I'm beaten. You needn't try any third degree. I'll tell."

Babbitts was so excited he could hardly breathe. The Big Story was his at last—he was going to hear the murderer's confession from his own lips. Ford lifted his head, and holding it high and defiant, looked at O'Mally and said slowly:

"I got that money from Hollings Harland for reporting to him the affair between Johnston Barker and Miss Whitehall."

If you'd hit him in the head with a brick Babbitts said he couldn't have been more knocked out. He had sense enough to smother the exclamation that nearly burst from him, but he *did* square round in his chair and look aghast at O'Mally. That old bird never gave a sign that he'd got a blow in the solar plexus. For all anyone could guess by his face, it was just what he'd expected to hear.

"You were in Harland's pay," he murmured, nodding his head.

"I was in Harland's pay from the first of December to the day of his death. In that time he gave me eight hundred dollars."

O'Mally, slouching comfortable against his chair back, drooped his head toward his shoulder and said:

"Suppose you tell us the whole thing, straight from the start. It'll be easier that way."

"Any way you want it," said Ford. "It's all the same to me. I first met Harland in the elevator some time in the end of November. Seeing me every day he spoke to me casually and civilly, as one man does to another. There was nothing more than that till Johnston Barker began coming to the Azalea Woods Estates, then,

bit by bit, Harland grew more friendly. I'll admit I was flattered, a chap in my position doesn't usually get more than a passing nod from a man in his. As he warmed up toward me, feeling his way with questions, I began to get a line on what he was after—he wanted a tab kept on Barker."

"Jealous?" O'Mally suggested.

"Desperately jealous. As soon as the thing opened up before me I saw how matters stood. He was secretly crazy about Miss Whitehall and was easy until Barker cut in, *then* he got alarmed. Barker was a bigger man than he, and there was no doubt about it that she liked Barker. When he realized that he put it up to me straight. He'd sized me up pretty thoroughly by that time and knew that I'd—what's the use of mincing matters—do his dirty work for him."

O'Mally inclined his head as if he was too polite to contradict.

"He offered me good money and all I had to do was to watch her and Barker and report what I heard or saw. It was a cinch—I was on the spot, the only other person in the office a fool of a stenographer, a girl, who hardly counted."

"What was the result of your—er—investigations?"

"That Barker was in love with her too. He came often on a flimsy excuse that he wanted to build a house in the tract. She was friendly at first, then for a while very cold and haughty—as if they might have had a quarrel. Then they seemed to make that up, and get as thick as thieves."

"Did *she* seem to care for Harland?"

"Not exactly—anyway not the way he did for her. She was always awfully nice to him—the few times he came into the office—gentle and sweet, but not the way she was with Barker. She was two different women to them—with Harland a sort of affable, gracious winner, but with Barker a girl with a man she's fond of, natural, glad to see him, no society stunts.

"A little before Christmas I caught on to the fact that she was receiving letters from Barker, and Harland offered me extra money if I'd get their contents. This wasn't so easy. Generally she took them away with her, but twice she left them on her desk. All I had to do then was to stay overtime and when she was gone, copy them. That way I got on to something that phazed us both—she and Barker were up to some scheme."

O'Mally moved slightly in his chair.

"Scheme?" he said—"What do you mean by scheme?"

"Something they were planning to do. After Christmas every time he'd come they'd go into the private office and talk there so low you couldn't catch a word. And the letters were all about it, but we couldn't get a line on what it was. I'll show them to you and you'll see for yourself. It got Harland wild, for though they

weren't exactly love letters, they showed that she and Barker were close knit in some secret enterprise."

"Did you continue this work till the day of the suicide?"

"I did—to the night—to the time it happened. Harland was getting more and more worked up. I don't know whether it was the Barker-Whitehall business or his own financial worries, but I could see he was holding the lid on with difficulty. That day, January fifteenth, as you may remember, he was in her office and had a talk with her. As he went out I saw that he looked cheered-up, brisk and confident. Of course I've no idea what she said to him, but knowing the state he was in, I'll swear it was something that gave him hope. Yet a few hours after that he killed himself.

"Seeing him so heartened up and being curious myself, I decided to stay that evening and do a little quiet snooping among her papers. But she nearly blocked that game. She was in the habit of going between half-past five and six, leaving me to close up. That night she didn't do it, but hung about in the office, and after watching her for a few minutes I saw that she was on the jump—moving about, going from one desk to the other, glancing at the clock. Her manner made me certain that something was up—it was possible it had to do with the scheme she and Barker were hatching. I got the idea that I'd go and come back after a while, on the chance of stumbling on something that would be useful to my employer. I left her there and after loafing round for about half an hour returned. The office was dark and she'd gone. I lit up and looked over her desk in the Exhibit Room and a table in my room where she kept some papers, but found nothing. Then I thought I'd take a look into the private office but that door was locked."

"Ah, locked," said O'Mally, calm as a summer sea. "Was that her custom?"

"Not as far as I knew. I'd never found it locked before. It gave me an uneasy feeling for I thought she might have suspected what I was doing and turned the key against any invasion of her particular sanctum. She was no fool and might have caught on. So I fixed up the papers as I found them and left the office. You know what time *that* was, or you do if you read of the Harland suicide. I've always supposed the poor chap was up that side corridor as I stood there waiting for the car."

Babbitts bent over his notebook scribbling—he had to hide his face. He told me he thought the expression on it of stunned, crestfallen blankness would have given him away to an idiot. Waiting with their ears stretched to hear a confession of murder—and *this* was what they got! And the man wasn't lying. Every word he'd said matched with the facts we'd been worming and digging to find. He couldn't possibly have known murder had been discovered—he hadn't

any suspicion a murder had been committed. The great revelation, that was to have broken on the public with an explosion like a dynamite bomb, was that Tony Ford was Harland's paid spy.

"Well," he said, looking at O'Mally, "what have you got to say? Go ahead with it if it'll give you any satisfaction. Only you needn't waste your breath. I know, without being told, that it's a rotten, dirty business."

O'Mally, his face as red as the harvest moon, pulled at his mustache looking thoughtful. But, sore as he must have been—you'd have to know O'Mally to realize what his disappointment was—he answered cool and easy:

"I ain't got anything to say. It's not my job to train the young. You've told me what I wanted to know—that's all I'm here for."

Ford turned to Babbitts and asked him to get some letters off the table and then went on to O'Mally:

"How did you come to find it out?"

Babbitts, gathering up the letters, cocked his head to listen, wondering how O'Mally was going to get out of it. But you couldn't phaze that veteran.

"Several ways—you see what we're after is Johnston Barker. It's the Copper Pool that owns us, and nosing round in our quiet little way we got on to the Barker-Whitehall affair and from that followed the scent to that legacy of yours. We didn't altogether believe in that uncle up-state—thought maybe he was Johnston Barker in private life, and that you might know something," he gave a lazy, good-humored laugh. "Got fooled all round. I don't mind telling you now that the way we happened on Sammis was pure accident. Thought he was Barker and had him shadowed. He looked like enough to him to have been his brother."

"That's so," said Ford, as Babbitts handed him the letters, "especially with his hat on. I noticed it myself." He selected two papers from the bunch and handed them to O'Mally. "There—those are the letters I spoke of. This one," he flicked it across the counterpane, "is just a note from Harland making a date. I don't know how I happened to keep it."

They were the three letters Babbitts had taken after the attack, copies of which at that moment were lying in O'Mally's pocket.

It was not till they were out on the hospital steps that they dared to speak. O'Mally's face was a study, his mouth drooped down to his chin and his eyes dismal and despairing like he'd come from a tragedy.

"Well!" he said, "what do you make of that?"

"Zero!"

"Not a thing to do with it, hasn't a suspicion of it, no more involved in it than that sparrow there," he pointed to a sparrow that had lit on the step near-by.



"I've had setbacks in my profession before—but this!" He stopped, stuck his hands into his pockets and stared blankly at the sparrow.

"Well, if it lets him out," said Babbitts, "it tightens the cords round the other two."

"Um," agreed O'Mally, still gazing stonily at the sparrow, "that's what keeps your spirits up."

"With him eliminated the whole thing concentrates on her and Barker."

"It does, my son." O'Mally roused up and came out of his depression. "Instead of a brain and a pair of hands as we've called it, it was a brain and one hand—the smart hand, the right. That was the woman."

He turned and began to descend the steps, taking Babbitts by the arm to draw him closer and speaking low:

"Do you see how it went? They were in the private office when Ford came back—she and Barker and the dead man. When they heard him come they switched off the light and locked the door—and, Great Scott, can you imagine how they felt! Shut in there in the dark with their victim, not knowing who Ford could be or what he was doing, listening to him rummaging round, his steps coming nearer, his hand on the doorknob! I'm too familiar with murder to see any terrors in it—but *that* situation! I've never known the beat of it in all my experience. Then when Ford goes—on his very heels—over and out with the thing they'd killed. And both of them back there again, or maybe stealing to the front windows and taking a look down at the crowd below."

They walked up the street arm in arm, talking in hushed voices. As he looked at the faces of the people that passed the thought came to Babbitts that in a short time, maybe a few days, they'd be reading in the papers of the awful crime not one of them now had a suspicion of.



# CHAPTER XV

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

I heard all this late that night from Babbitts. But there was more to it than I've told in the last chapter, for after they left the hospital O'Mally and Babbitts went to the Whitney office and had a séance with the old man and Mr. George.

Though Ford had disappointed them his story had made the way clear for a decisive move. This was decided upon then and there. On Monday morning they would ask Miss Whitehall to come to Whitney & Whitney's and subject her to a real examination. If she maintained her pose of ignorance they would suddenly face her with their complete information. They felt tolerably certain this would be too much for her, secure in her belief that no murder had been suspected. Surprise and terror would seize her, even a hardened criminal, placed unexpectedly in such a position, was liable to break down.

The next day was Sunday. I'll not forget it in a hurry. Many a high pressure day I've had in my twenty-five years but none that had anything over that one. It was gray and overcast, clouds low down over the roofs which stretched away in a gray huddle of flat tops and slanting mansards and chimneys and clotheslines. Babbitts spent the morning on the davenport looking like he was in a boat floating through a sea of newspapers. I couldn't settle down to anything, thinking of what was going to happen the next morning, thinking of that girl, that beautiful girl, with her soul stained with crime, and wondering if she could feel the shadow that was falling across her.

After lunch Himself went out saying he'd take a shot at finding Freddy Jaspar and going with him up to Yonkers where there'd been some anarchist row. He was restless too. If things turned out right he'd get his Big Story at last—and what a story it would be!—he'd get a raise for certain, and as he kissed me good-bye he

said he'd give me the two glass lamps and a new set of furs, anything I wanted short of sable or ermine.

In the afternoon Iola dropped in all dolled up and decked with a permanent smile, for she'd landed her new job and liked it fine. As she prattled away she let drop something that caught my ear, and lucky it was as you'll see presently. On her way over she'd met Delia, the Whitehalls' maid, who told her the ladies were going to move back to the Azalea Woods Estates where someone had given them a cottage. Delia had just been to see them and found that Mrs. Whitehall had already gone, and Miss Whitehall was packing up to follow on Monday afternoon. Iola thought it was nice they'd got the cottage but didn't I think Miss Whitehall would be afraid of the dullness of the country after living in town? I said you never could tell. What I thought was that if there was anything for Miss Whitehall to be afraid of it wasn't dullness.

At six Iola left, having a date for supper, and a little after that I had a call from Babbitts, saying he and Freddy Jaspar had found the anarchist business more important than they expected and he wouldn't be home till all hours.

Isabella doesn't come on Sunday so I got my own supper and then sat down in the parlor and tried to read the papers. But I couldn't put my mind on them. In a few days, perhaps as soon as Tuesday, the *Dispatch* would have the Harland murder on the front page. I could see the headlines—the copy reader could spread himself—and I tried to work out how Babbitts would write it, where he'd begin—with the crime itself or with all the story that came before it.

It was near eleven and me thinking of bed when there was a ring at the bell. That's pretty late for callers, even in a newspaper man's flat, and I jumped up and ran into the hall. After I'd jammed the push button, I opened the door, spying out for the head coming up the stairs. It came—a derby hat and a pair of broad shoulders, and then Jack Reddy's face, raised to mine, grave and frowning.

"Hello, Molly," he said. "It's late, but I couldn't find any of the others so I came to you."

If he hadn't seen anyone he didn't know what had transpired. The thought made me bubble up with eagerness to tell him the new developments. That was the reason, I guess, I didn't notice how serious he was, not a smile of greeting, not a handshake. He didn't even take off his coat, but throwing his hat on one of the hallpegs, said:

"I've only just got in from Buffalo. I phoned to the Whitney house from the Grand Central, but they're both out of town, not to be back till tomorrow morning, and O'Mally's away too. Do you know how Ford is?"

"You bet I do. He's sat up, taken nourishment and *talked*."

"Talked? Have they *seen* him?"

"They have." I turned away and moved up the hall. "Come right in and I'll tell you."

I went into the dining-room where the drop light hung bright over the table, and was going on to the parlor when I heard his voice, loud and commanding, behind me:

"What's he said?"

I whisked round and there he was standing by the table, his eyes fixed hard and almost fierce on me.

"Won't you come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," I said laughing, just to tease him. He answered without the ghost of a smile:

"No. Go on quick. What did Ford say?"

"All right." I dropped down into Babbitts' chair and motioned him to mine. "Sit down there. It's a long story and I can't tell it to you if you stand in front of me like a patience on a monument."

He took the chair and putting his elbows on the table, raised his hands, clasped together, and leaned his mouth on them. The light fell full on his face and over those clasped hands his eyes stared at me so fixed and steady they looked the eyes of an image. I don't think while I told him he ever batted a lid and I know he never said a word.

"So you see," I said, when I was through, "Ford's as much out of it as you are."

Without moving his hands he asked:

"What do they think?"

"Why, what do you suppose they think? Instead of there being three of them in it there were two."

"They think she and Barker did it?"

"Of course. They've worked it out this way"—I leaned over the table, my voice low, giving him the details of their new theory. As I told it there was something terrible in those eyes. All the kindness went out of them and a fire came in its place till they looked like crystals with a flame behind them.

When I finished he spoke and this time his voice sounded different, hoarse and muffled:

"Have they made any plan? Decided on their next step?"

"They've got it all arranged," and I went on about the interview that was planned for the next morning. "With her thinking herself safe the way she does, they're sure they can give her such a jolt she'll lose her nerve and tell."

He gave an exclamation, not words, just a choked, fierce sound, and dropping his hands on the table, burst out like a volcano:

"The dogs! The devils! Dragging her down there to terrify a lie out of her!"

He leaped to his feet, sending the chair crashing down on the floor. I fell back where I sat paralyzed, not only by his words, but at the sight of him.

I think I've spoken of the fact that he had a violent temper and he's told me himself that he's conquered it. But now for the first time I saw it and *believe me* it was far from dead. I would hardly have known him. His face was savage, his eyes blazing, and the words came from him as if they were shot out on the breaths that broke in great heaving gasps from his lungs.

"Haven't you," he said, "a woman, any heart in you? Are you, that I've always thought all kindness and generosity, willing to hound an innocent girl to her ruin?"

He grabbed the back of a chair near him and leaned over it glaring at me, shaking, gasping, and the color of ashes.

"But—but," I faltered, "she's *done* it."

"She hasn't," he shouted. "You're all fools, imbeciles, mad. It's a lie—an infamous, brutal lie!"

He dropped the chair and turned away, beginning to pace up and down, his hands clenched, raging to himself. The room was full of the sound of his breathing, as if some great throbbing piece of machinery was inside him.

And I—there in my seat, fallen limp against the back—saw it all. What a fool I'd been—what an *idiot*! He with his empty heart and that beautiful girl—the girl that any man might have loved and how much more Jack Reddy, knowing her poor and lonesome and believing her innocent and persecuted. I felt as if the skies had fallen on me. My hero—that I'd never found a woman good enough for—in love with a murderess!

He stopped in his pacing and tried to get a grip on himself, tried to speak quietly with his voice gone to a husky murmur:

"Tomorrow do you say? Tomorrow they're going to do this damnable thing?"

"Tomorrow at ten in Mr. Whitney's office," I answered, weak and trembling.

He stood for a moment looking on the ground, his brows drawn low over his eyes, the bones of his jaw showing set under the flesh. A deadly fear seized me—a fear that followed on a flash of understanding. I got up—I guess as white as he was—and went over to him.

"Jack," I said. "You can't do anything. Everything's against her. There's not a point that doesn't show she's guilty."

He gave me a look from under his eyebrows like the thrust of a sword.

"Don't say that to me again, Molly," he almost whispered, "or I'll forget the debt I owe you and the affection I've felt for you since the day we swore to be friends."

"What can you do?" I cried, fairly distracted. "They've got the evidence. It's there——"

I tried to put my hand on his arm but he shook it off and walked toward the door. I followed him and during those few short steps from the dining-room to the hall, it came to me as clear as if he'd said it that he was going to Carol Whitehall to help her run away.

"What are you going to do?" I said, standing in the doorway as he pulled his hat off the peg and turned toward the hall door.

"That's my affair," he threw back over his shoulder.

He had his hand on the knob when a thought—an inspiration flashed on me. I don't know where it came from, but when you're fond of a person and see them headed for a precipice, I believe you get some sort of wireless communication from Heaven or some place of that order.

"Miss Whitehall's not in town now," I said.

He stopped short and looked back at me:

"Where is she?"

"They've gone back to New Jersey. Some people loaned them a cottage in the Azalea Woods Estates."

"I knew that—but they're not there yet?"

"Yes. They went yesterday, sooner than they expected."

He stood for a moment, looking at the floor, then glanced back at me and said:

"Thank you for telling me that. Good night."

The door opened, banged shut and I was alone.

I wonder if anyone reading this story can imagine what I felt. It was awful, so awful that now, here, writing it down peaceful and happy, I can feel the sinking at my heart and the sick sensation like I could never eat food again. And *laugh*? It was an art I'd lost and never in this world would get back.

It was not only that he loved her—*that* woman, that vampire, who could sin at the word of an old man—but it was the thought, the certainty, that he was ready to betray his trust, go back on his partners, be a traitor to his office. All the work they'd done, all the hopes they'd built up, all their efforts for success, he was going to destroy. It was disgrace for him, he'd never get over it, he'd be an outcast. As long as he lived he'd be pointed at as the man who gave his honor for

the love of a wicked woman.

That was the first of my thoughts and the second was that I wasn't going to let him do it. There was just one way of preventing it, and honest to God—think as badly of me as you like, I can't help it—when I got what that way was I was so relieved I didn't care whether I was a traitor or not. All that mattered then was if there'd got to be one—and as far as I could see there had to—it was better for it to be Molly Babbitts, who didn't amount to much in the world, than Jack Reddy, who was a big man and was going to be a bigger.

As I put on my coat and hat I heard the clock strike half-past eleven. There were no trains out to the Azalea Woods Estates before seven the next morning. Even if he took his own auto, which I guessed he'd do, it would take him the best part of an hour and a half to get there, and long before that she'd have had her warning from me.

Yes—that's what I was going to do—go to her and tell her before he could. Dishonest? Well, I guess yes! I know what's straight from what's crooked as well as most. But it seemed to me the future of a man, *that* man—was worth more than my pledged word, or the glory of Whitney & Whitney, or Babbitts' scoop. *That* was the cruelest of all—my own dear beloved Soapy—to go back on him too! Gosh!—going over in the taxi through the dark still streets, *how* I felt! But it didn't matter. If I *died* when I was through I'd *got* to do it. Maybe you never experienced those sensations, maybe you can't understand. But, take it from me, there are people who'd break all the commandments and all the laws to save their friends and, bad or good, I'm one of them.



# CHAPTER XVI

## MOLLY TELLS THE STORY

As the taxi rolled up to her corner I saw that the windows of her floor were bright. She was still up, which would make things easier—much better than having to wake her from her sleep. In that sort of apartment they lock the outer doors at half-past ten and to get at the bells you have to wake the janitor, which I didn't want to do, as no one must know I'd been there. So before I rang the outside bell that connects with his lair in the basement, I tried the door, hoping some late comer had left it on the jar as they sometimes do. It opened—an immense piece of luck—which made me feel that fate was on my side and braced me like a tonic.

In the vestibule I pressed the button under her letter box and in a minute came the click, click of the inner latch and I entered. As I ascended the stairs I heard the door on the landing above softly open and looking up I saw a bright light illumine the dimness and then, through the balustrade, her figure standing on the threshold.

She must have been surprised for the person who mounted into her sight—a girl in a dark coat and hat—was someone she'd never seen before. She pushed the door wider, as if to let more light on me, looking puzzled at my face. The one electric bulb was just above her on the wall and its sickly gleam fell over her, tall and straight in a purple silk kimono. Her black hair curling back from her forehead stood out like a frame, and her neck, between the folds of the kimono, was as smooth and white as cream. The sight of her instead of weakening me gave me strength, for in that sort of careless rig, tired and pale, she was still handsome enough to make a fool of any man.

"Do you want to see *me*?" she said, "Miss Whitehall?"

"I do," I answered. "I want to see you on a matter of importance. It can't wait."

Without another word she drew back from the doorway and let me come in.

"Go in there," she said, pointing up the hall to the curtained entrance of the dining-room, and I went as she pointed.

The room was brightly lit, as was the parlor beyond, and on every side were the signs of moving—curtains piled below the windows, furniture in white covers, straw and bits of paper on the floor. Two trunks were standing in the middle of the parlor and on the chairs about were her clothes, all tumbled and mixed up, boots in one place, hats in another, lingerie heaped on the table. There was enough packing to keep her busy till morning, and I thought to myself that was what she intended to do—finish it up tonight and the next day make her move.

All this took only a minute to see and I was standing by the dining-table, clutching tight on my muff to hide the trembling of my hands, when she came in. In the brighter light I could see that she looked worn and weary, all her color gone except for the red of her lips, and her eyes sunken and dark underneath.

"What do you want with me?" she said, as the curtain fell behind her.

Her manner was abrupt and straight from the shoulder like a person's who's got past little pleasantnesses and politeness. The glance she fixed on me was steady and clear, but there was a sort of waiting expectation in it like she was ready for anything and braced to meet it.

"I came," I said, choosing my words as careful as I could, "to tell you of—of—something that's going to happen—to warn you."

She gave a start and her face changed, as if a spring inside her had snapped and sort of focussed her whole being into a still, breathless listening.

"Warn me," she repeated. "Of what?"

"Miss Whitehall," I said, clearing my throat, for it was dry, "I'm a person you don't know, but I know you. I've been employed by people here in New York who've been watching you for the past few weeks. They've got the evidence they want—I've been helping them—and they're ready to act."

As I had spoken she had never taken her eyes off me. Big and black and unwinking they stared and as I stared back I could see it wasn't surprise or fear they showed but a concentrated attention.

"What do you mean—act in what way?"

"Get you to their office tomorrow and question you about the Harland case and make you confess."

She was as still as a statue. You'd have thought she was turned to stone, but for the moving up and down of her chest.

"What am I to confess? What have I done?"

My hands gripped together in my muff and my voice went down to my boots for I couldn't say it aloud.

"Been a party to the murder of Hollings Harland."

When I said it I had an expectation that she'd say something, deny it in some violent way that would make me think she was innocent. Maybe Jack Reddy had influenced me, but I wanted it, I looked for it, I hoped for it—and I was disappointed. If it *had* been a shock to her, if she *hadn't* known there'd been a murder, she would never have behaved as she did. For she said not a word, standing stock still, her face chalk white, even the red fading from her lips, and her eyes fixed on the wall opposite, like the eyes of a sleep-walker.

"The murder of Hollings Harland," she whispered, and it was more as if she was speaking to herself than to me.

"Yes," I went on. "They've discovered it—a group of us have been working in secret, following the clues and gathering the evidence. Now we've got it all ready and tomorrow they expect to arrest you."

She suddenly sank down into a chair by the table, her hands braced against its edge, her eyes riveted in that strange, mesmerized stare on the fern plant in front of her.

"When did they discover it?" she said in a low voice.

"Not long after it happened—but that doesn't matter. They've got everything in their hands. Even if you insist that you're innocent they've got enough to arrest you on. You've been under surveillance all along—they've been shadowing you. They followed you that time you tried to go to Toronto."

"I knew that," she said in the same low voice as if she was talking to herself.

"They know how you came out of the building that night—not by the elevator as you said, but by the stairs, and how you didn't get home till nearly eight. They know about you and Barker."

She lifted her head and said quickly:

"What do they know about me and Barker?"

"That he was in love with you and you with him."

"Oh, *that!*" Her tone was indifferent as if the point was a matter of no consequence.

"They know how the murder was done. How you and Barker did it."

"Barker and I—" She sank back in her chair, then suddenly leaning across the table, looked into my face and said, "Tell me how we did it. Let me see what



*'When did they discover it?' she said  
in a low voice.*

they know."

I took the chair opposite and told her the whole plot and how we'd worked it out. While I was doing it she never said a word, but sat with her profile toward me and her eyes in that blank, motionless stare on the fern plant.

When I had finished there was a pause, then suddenly she drew a deep breath, turned toward me and said:

"What brought you here to me tonight?"

It came so unexpectedly I had no answer ready. What I'd looked for was a scene, terror, maybe hysterics and her breaking away as fast as she could put on her hat. Seeing me stupidly dumb she rose out of her chair, and moved away for a few steps, then stopped and seemed again to fall into that trance of thinking. It was like everything else in this nightmare—different to what I'd looked for, and a sickening thought came to me that maybe she was ready to throw up the sponge and go down and confess. And then—for all I knew—Jack Reddy might persuade her to marry him and go to prison with her. How can you be sure what a man crazy with love will do? If she got a life sentence he'd probably live at the gates of Sing Sing for the rest of his days. I was desperate and went round the table after her.

"Say," I implored. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm thinking," she muttered.

"For God's sake don't *think*," I wailed. "Get up and act. If I go back on the people that employ me and come here in the middle of the night to warn you, isn't it the least you can do to take advantage of it and go?"

She wheeled round on me, her face all alight with a wonderful beaming look.

"*That's* the reason," she said. "That's what made you come—humanity—pity! You've risked everything to help me. Oh, you don't know what you've done—what courage you've put into me. And you don't know what my gratitude is."

Before I knew it she had seized hold of one of my hands and held it against her heart, with her head bowed over it as if she was praying.

Do you guess how *I* felt? Ashamed?—perishing with it, ready to sink down on the floor and pass away. A murderess no doubt but even if a murderess thinks you did her a good turn when you didn't it makes you feel like a snake's a high-class animal beside you.

"Oh, come on," I begged. "Let go of me and get out."

She dropped my hand and looked at me—Oh, so soft and sweet!—and I saw tears in her eyes. *That* pretty near finished me and I wailed out:

"Don't stop to cry. You don't know but what they might get uneasy and come tonight. Put on your things and go."

Hadn't I got to hurry her? If Jack made a quick trip he'd be back in town between two and three and he'd come as straight as wheels could take him to her door.

"Yes, I'll go," she said.

"Now," I urged, "as soon as you can get into your coat and hat. Don't bother about this," I pointed to the disorder round us—"They'll think you've had another message from Barker and gone to him."

A curious, slight smile came over her face.

"Yes," she said, "that's what they *will* think, I suppose."

"Of course it is, and they'll waste time looking for him which'll give *you* a good start. If there's no train now to the place you're going to, sit in the depot, ride round in a taxi, walk up and down Fifth Avenue, only *get out* of this place."

"I'll be gone in half an hour," she said, and moved between the trunks and piled up clothes to the bedroom beyond. I followed her and saw into the room, all confusion like the others, every gas in the chandelier blazing.

"Can I help you?" I said. "Can I pack a suitcase or anything?"

"No—" she halted in front of the mirror, letting the kimono slide off her to the floor, her arms and neck like shining marble under that blaze of light. "I'll only want a few things. There's a bag there I can throw them into. You'd better go now."

I was afraid she'd not be as quick as I wanted but I couldn't hang round urging any more after she'd told me to go. Besides I could see she was hurrying, grabbing a dress from the bed and getting into it so swiftly even I was satisfied.

"Well then I'm off," I said.

She looked up from the hooks she was snapping together and said:

"Before you go tell me who you are?"

"There's no need for that," I answered, thinking she'd probably never see me again. "I'm just someone that blew in tonight for a minute and who's going like she came."

"Someone I'll never forget," she said, "and that some day, if all goes well, I'll be able to pay back."

I was afraid she was going to get grateful again and I couldn't stand any more of that. So with a quick "good-bye" away I went, up the hall, opening the door without a sound, and stealing down the stairs as soft as a robber.

Out in the street I stopped and reconnoitered. There was no one in sight except a policeman lounging dreary on the next corner. Across from the apart-

ment was the entrance of a little shop—tobacco and light literature—and into that I crept, squeezing back against the glass door. I couldn't be at peace till I saw her leave and for fifteen or twenty minutes I stood there watching the lights in her windows. Then suddenly they began to go out, across the front and along down the side, till every pane was black. A few minutes later, she came down the steps carrying a bag. She stopped close to where I was, and hailed a car, and not till I saw it start with her sitting by the door, did I steal out of my hiding place and sprint up the street to Madison Avenue.

When I reached home I was shivering and wild-eyed, for if Babbitts was there what could I say to him? He wasn't—thank Heaven!—and cold as ice, feeling as if I'd been through a mangle, I crawled into bed.

There wasn't much sleep for me that night. About all I could say to myself was that I'd saved Jack. But the others—Oh, *the others!* I couldn't get them out of my mind. They'd come in a procession across the dark and look at me sad and reproachful. Mr. Whitney, who'd done everything in the world for me, and Mr. George, who could put on such side, but had always been so kind and cordial, and O'Mally, who'd told Babbitts the case was going to make him, and Babbitts—Oh, *Babbitts!*

I rolled over on the pillow and cried scalding, bitter tears. It wasn't only the scoop—it was that I'd have a secret from him forever—him that up to now had known every thought in my mind, had been like the other half of me. They say virtue is its own reward, and I've always believed it. But that night I had the awful thought that maybe I'd done wrong, for all the reward I got was to feel like an outcast with a stone for a heart.





# CHAPTER XVII

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

That night when I left Molly there was only one thought in my mind—to reach Carol and help her get away. If the figure of Barker had not stood between us I would have then and there implored her to marry me and give me the right to fight for her. But I knew that was hopeless. As things stood, all I could do was to tell her the situation and give her a chance to escape.

I suppose it's a pretty damaging confession but the office, my duty to my work and my associates, cut no ice at all. Heretofore I'd rather patted myself on the back as a man who stood by his obligations. That night only one obligation existed for me—to protect from disgrace the woman I loved.

I knew the trains to Azalea—it was on the road to Firehill—and though one left at midnight, the last train on the branch line to the Azalea Woods Estates had long gone. The shortest and quickest way for me to get there was to take out my own car. This would also insure the necessary secrecy. I could bring her back with me and let her slip away in the crowds at one of the big stations.

It was a wild, windy night, a waning moon showing between long streamers of clouds. By the time I struck the New Jersey shore—after maddening delays in the garage and at the ferry—it was getting on for one, and the clouds had spread black over the sky. It was a fiendish ride for a man on fire as I was. For miles the road looped through a country as dark as a pocket, broken with ice-skimmed pools and deep-driven ruts. In the daylight I could have made the whole distance inside an hour, but it was after two when I came to the branch line junction and turned up the long winding road that led over the hills to the Azalea Woods Estates.

As I sighted the little red-roofed station and the houses dotted over the tract, the moon came out and I slowed up, having no idea where the cottage was or what

it looked like. The place was quiet as the grave, the light sleeping on the pale walls of the stucco villas backed by the wooded darkness of the hills.

I was preparing to get out and rouse one of the slumbering inhabitants when I heard the voices of women. They were coming down a side road and looking up it I saw three figures moving toward me, their shadows slanting black in front of them. At the gate of a large, white-walled house, two of them turned in, their good-nights clear on the frosty air, and the third advanced in my direction. I could see her skirts, light-colored below her long dark coat, and her head tied up in some sort of scarf. By their clothes and voices I judged them to be servant girls coming back from a party.

As she approached I hailed her with a careful question:

"I beg your pardon, but I think I'm lost. Can you tell me where I am?"

"I can," she said, drawing up by the car. "You're in the Azalea Woods Estates."

"Oh, I *am* a bit out of my way. The Azalea Woods Estates," I surveyed the scattered houses and wide-cut avenues, "I've heard of them but never seen them before. Doesn't a Mrs. Whitehall live here?"

The girl smiled; she had a pleasant, good-natured face.

"She surely does—in the Regan cottage over beyond the crest there. I'm living with her, doing the heavy work, until she gets settled. I belong on the big farm, but as she was lonesome and had no girl I said I'd come over and stay till her daughter joined her."

I smothered a start—*could* Molly have made a mistake?

"Her daughter, eh? Isn't her daughter with her now?"

"No, sir. She's coming tomorrow afternoon, then I'm going home. We'll have the cottage all ready for her. She's not expected till the 2.40 from town. Do you know the ladies?"

I bent over the wheel, afraid even by that pale light my face might show too much. Molly *had* made a mistake, sent me out here on a fruitless quest, wasted three or four precious hours. I could have wrung her neck. I heard my voice veiled and husky as I answered:

"Only by hearsay. I knew Miss Whitehall was the head of the enterprise, that's all. Er—er—it's Azalea I'm aiming for. How do I get there?"

She laughed.

"Well you *are* out of your way. You'll have to go back to the Junction on the main line. Then follow the road straight ahead and you'll strike Azalea—about twenty miles farther on."

"Thank you," I said and began to back the car for the turn.

"No thanks," she answered and as I swung around called out a cheery "Good night."

That ride back—shall I ever forget it! It was as if an evil genius was halting me by every means malevolence could devise. Before I reached the highway the moon disappeared and the darkness settled down like a blanket. The wind was in my face this way and it stung till the water ran out of my eyes. Squinting through tears I had to make out the line of the road, black between black hedges and blacker fields. I went as fast as I dared—nothing must happen to me that night for if I failed her, Carol was lost. With the desire to let the car out as if I was competing in the Vanderbilt Cup Race, I had to slow down for corners and creep through the long winding ways that threaded the woods.

And finally—in a barren stretch without a light or a house in sight a tire blew out! I won't write about it—what's the use? It's enough to say it was nearly six, and the East pale with the new day, when I rushed into Jersey City. I was desperate then, and police or no police, flashed like a gray streak through the town to the ferry.

On the boat I had time to think. I decided to phone her, tell her I was coming and to be dressed and ready. I could still get her off three or four hours ahead of them. I stopped at the first drug store and called her up. The wait seemed endless, then a drawling, nasal voice said, "I can't raise the number. Lenox 1360 don't answer." I got back in the car with my teeth set—sleeping so sound on this morning of all mornings! Poor, unsuspecting Carol!

The day was bright, the slanting sun rays touching roofs and chimneys, when I ran up along the curb at her door. An old man in a dirty jumper who was sweeping the sidewalk, stopped as he saw me leap out and run up the steps. The outer door was shut and as I turned I almost ran into him, standing at my heels with his broom in his hand. He said he was the janitor, took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and unlocked the door, fastening the two leaves back as I pressed her bell.

There was no answering click of the latch and I tried the inner door—fast, and all my shaking failed to budge it.

"Isn't Miss Whitehall here?" I said, turning on the man who was watching me interestedly.

"Sure," he answered. "Anyways she was last night. She talked to me down the dumbwaiter at seven and told me she wasn't going till this afternoon."

"Open the door," I ordered, speaking as quietly as I could. "She's probably asleep—I've an important message for her, and I want to give it now before I go downtown."

He did as I told him and I ran up the stairs, and pressed the electric button at her door. As I waited I heard the janitor's slow steps pounding up behind me, but from the closed apartment there was not a sound.

"She ain't there, I guess," he said as he gained the landing. "She must have gone last night."

I turned on him:

"Have you a key for this apartment?"

"I've a key for every apartment," he answered, holding out the bunch in his hand.

"Then open the door. If she's not here I've got to know it."

He inserted a key in the lock and in a minute we were inside. The morning light filtered in through drawn blinds, showing a deserted place, left in the chaos of a hasty move. Everything was in disorder, trunks open, furniture stacked and covered. The curtains to the front bedroom that I'd always seen closed were pulled back, revealing the evidences of a hurried packing, clothes on the bed, bureau drawers half out, a purple silk thing lying in a heap on the floor.

She was gone, gone in wild haste, gone like one who leaves on a summons as imperative as the call of death—or love!

"She's evidently gone to her mother or some friend for the night," I said carelessly. "She'll be back again to finish it up."

The janitor agreed and asked if I'd leave a message. No, I'd phone up later. I cautioned him to keep my visit quiet and he nodded understandingly—took me for a desperate lover, which Heaven knows I was. But in order to run no risks of his speaking to those who would follow me, I sealed his lips with a bill that left him speechless and bowing to the ground.

I was in my own apartment before Joanna and David were up, ready to be called to breakfast from what they, in their fond old hearts, thought was a good night's rest. Sitting on the side of my bed, with my head in my hands, I struggled for the coolness that day would need. Of course she'd gone to Barker—nothing else explained it. The state of the apartment proved she had intended leaving for the cottage, her mother had unquestionably expected her, not a soul in the world but myself could have warned her. Only another command from the man who ruled her life could account for her disappearance. Some time that night she had heard from him, and once again had gone to join him. I tried to dull my pain with the thought that she was safe, kept whispering it over and over, and through it and under it like the unspoken anguish of a nightmare went the other, "She's with him, flown to him, in his arms."

There was fury in me against every man in the Whitney office, but I could no more have kept away from it than I could have from her if she'd been near me. At nine o'clock I was there and found the chief, George and O'Mally already assembled. The air was charged with excitement, the long, slow work had reached its climax, the bloodhounds were in sight of the quarry. I could see the assurance of victory in their faces, hear it in the triumphant note of their voices. I don't think any man has ever stood higher in my esteem than Wilbur Whitney, but that morning, with the machinery of his devising ready to close on his victim, I hated him.

Immediately after I arrived they sent a phone message to her. I sat back near the window, to all intents and purposes a quiet, unobtrusive member of the quartette. When the reply came that the number didn't answer they concluded she was out, arranging for her departure that afternoon. The second message went at 9.30, and on the receipt of the same answer, a slight, premonitory uneasiness was visible. A third call was sent a few minutes before ten and this time central volunteered the information that "Lenox 1360 wasn't answering at all that morning."

The chief and O'Mally kept their pose of an unruffled confidence, but George couldn't fake it—he was wild-eyed with alarm. After a few minutes' consultation O'Mally was sent off to find out what was up, leaving the chief musing in his big chair and George swinging like a pendulum from room to room. I had to listen to him—he only got grunts from his father—and it took pretty nearly all the control I had to answer the stream of questions and surmises he deluged me with.

When O'Mally came back with the news that the bird had flown, the fall of the triumph of Whitney & Whitney was dire and dreadful. The announcement was met by dead silence, then George burst out sentences of sputtering fury, heads would drop in the basket after this. Even the chief was shaken out of his stolidity, rising from his chair, a terrible, old figure, fierce and bristling like an angry lion. I don't think in the history of the firm they'd ever had a worse jar, a more complete collapse in the moment of victory.

But O'Mally and the old man were too tried and seasoned timber to let their rage stand in the way. The detective had hardly finished before they were up at the table getting at their next move. All were agreed that she had had another communication from Barker and had gone to him. They saw it as I had—as anyone who knew the circumstances would. The first message had been by phone, the second might have been, and there was the shade of a possibility that she might have phoned back. If she had there would be a record, easily traced. The power of the Whitney office stretched far and through devious channels. In fifteen minutes

the machinery was started to have the records of all out of town messages sent from Lenox 1360 within the last week turned in to Whitney & Whitney.

It was what I'd feared, but I was powerless, also I thought the chances were in her favor. Barker, no matter how he loved her, might not dare to trust her with his telephone number. Judging by the way he had frustrated all our efforts to find him, he was taking no risks. It would have been in keeping with his unremitting caution to hold all communications with her by letter. That kept me quiet, kept me from bursting out on them as they schemed and plotted close drawn round the table.

The next move was suggested by the chief—to find Mrs. Whitehall and bring her to the office. In default of the daughter they would try the mother. All were of the opinion that the older woman was ignorant of the murder, but it was possible that she might know something of her daughter's movements. And even if she didn't, that attack by surprise which was to have broken down Carol Whitehall might, tried in a lesser degree, draw forth some illuminating facts from her mother. It was nearly midday when George and O'Mally set out in a high-powered motor for the Azalea Woods Estates.

I spent the next few hours in my own office, sitting at the desk. Every nerve was as tight as a violin string, hope and dread changing places in my mind. Awful hours, now when I look back on them. The whole thing hung on a chance. If her recent communications with Barker had been by letter, if her mother knew nothing, there was a fighting hope for her. But if she knew his number and *had* phoned—if her flight had been planned and Mrs. Whitehall *did* know! I remembered her as I'd seen her in the country, a fragile, melancholy woman. What chance had she with the men pitted against her?

I don't know what time it was, but the sun had swung round to the window, when I heard steps in the passage and a woman's voice, high and quavering. I leaped up and entered the chief's office by one door as Mrs. Whitehall, George and O'Mally came in by the other.

She looked pale and shriveled. I didn't then know what they'd said to her, whether they'd already tried their damnable third degree. But they hadn't, all they had done was to tell her her daughter had been wanted at the Whitney office and couldn't be found. That scared her, she'd come with them at once, only insisting that they stop at the flat and let her see that Carol was not there. This they did, admitting afterward that her surprise and alarm struck them as absolutely genuine.

These emotions were plain on her face; any fool could see she was racked with fear and anxiety. It was stamped on her features, it was in her wildly ques-

tioning eyes.

"Mr. Whitney," she said, without preamble or greeting, "what does this mean? Where is my daughter?"

The old man was as courteous as ever, but under the studied urbanity of his manner, I could feel the knife-edged sharpness that only cut through when his blood was up.

"*That* is what we want to know from you, Mrs. Whitehall. We needed some information from your daughter this morning and we find that she has—I think I may say, fled. Where to, surely you, her mother, must know."

"No," she cried, her hollow eyes riveted on his. "No. She was coming to me this afternoon, everything was arranged, ready and waiting. And now she's gone, and you, you men here, want to find her. What is it? There's something strange, something I don't know." Her glance moved over the watching faces. They were ominously unresponsive. Where she looked for hope or help she saw nothing but a veiled menace, every moment growing clearer.

"What is it?" she cried, her voice rising to a higher note, shrill and shaking. "What is the matter? Tell me. You know—you know something you're hiding from me?"

"We think that of you, Mrs. Whitehall," said the chief, ponderous and lowering, "and we want to hear it. The time has come for frankness. Hold nothing back for, as you say, we *know*."

The woman gave a gasp and took a step nearer to him:

"Then for God's sake tell me. Where has she gone?"

His answer came like the spring of an animal on its prey:

"To join her lover, Johnston Barker."

If he expected to have it strike with an impact he was not disappointed. She fell back as if threatened by a blow, and for a second stood transfixed, aghast, her lower jaw dropped, staring at him. Amazement isn't the word for the look on her face, it was a stupefaction, a paralysis of astonishment. The shock was so violent it swept away all anxiety for her daughter, but it also snapped the last frail remnant of her nerve. From her pale lips her voice broke in a wild, hysterical cry:

"Her lover! He was her *father*!"





# CHAPTER XVIII

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

In the moment of silence which followed that sentence you could hear the fire snap and the tick of the clock on the mantel. I saw the men's faces held in expressions of amazement so intense they looked like caricatures. I saw Mrs. Whitehall try to say something, then with a rustle and a broken cry crumple up in a chair, her face hidden, stuttering, choked sounds coming from behind her hands.

That broke the tension. Like a piece of machinery momentarily out of gear, the group adjusted itself and snapped back into action. All but me—I stood as I had been standing when Mrs. Whitehall spoke those words. My outward vision saw their moving figures, their backs as they crowded round her, a hand that held a glass to her lips, her face bent toward the glass, ashen and haggard. I saw but realized nothing. For a moment I was on another plane of existence, seemed to be shot up into it. I don't tell it right—a fellow who doesn't know how to write can't explain a feeling like that. You've got to fill it in out of your imagination. A man who's been in hell gets suddenly out—that's the best way I can describe it.

I didn't get back to my moorings, come down from the clouds to the solid ground, till the scene by the table was over. Mrs. Whitehall was sitting up, a little color in her cheeks, mistress of herself again. They'd evidently said something to lull her fears about Carol for the distraction of her mood was gone. It wasn't till I saw the narrowed interest of George's eyes, the hungry expectation of O'Mally's watching face, that I remembered they were still on the scent of a murder in which Barker's daughter was as much involved as Barker's fiancée. *That* brought me back to the moment and its meaning like an electric shock.

I made a stride forward, to get closer, to hear them, for they were at the table again, waiting on the words of Mrs. Whitehall. The first sentence that struck my

ear aptly matched her pitiful appearance:

"Gentlemen, I'm broken. I've been through too much."

The chief answered very gently:

"Having said what you have, would it not be wisdom to tell us everything? We pledge ourselves to secrecy."

She nodded, a gesture of weary acquiescence.

"Oh, yes. I don't mind telling—it *was* to be told; but," she dropped her eyes to her hands clasped in her lap. In that position her likeness to Carol, as she had sat there a few weeks before, was singularly striking. "I'll have to go back a good many years, before my child was born, before the world had heard of Johnston Barker."

"Wherever you want, Mrs. Whitehall," the chief murmured. "We're entirely at your service."

She drew a deep breath and without raising her eyes said:

"I was married to Johnston Barker twenty-eight years ago in Idaho. He was a miner then and I was a school teacher, nineteen years old, an orphan with no near relations. I was not strong and had gone to the Far West for my health. Under the unaccustomed work I broke down, developing a weakness of the lungs, and casual friends, the parents of a pupil, took me with them to a distant mining camp for the drier air. There I met Johnston and we became engaged.

"In those days in such remote places there were no churches or clergymen and contract marriages were recognized. I did not believe in them, would not at first consent to such a ceremony, but a great strike taking place in a distant camp, he prevailed upon me to marry him by contract, the friends with whom I was living acting as witnesses.

"The place to which he took me was wild and inaccessible, connecting by trails with other camps and by a long stage journey with a distant railway station. We lived there for a month—happy as I have never been since. Then a woman, a snake in the garden, finding out how I had married hinted to me that such contracts were illegal. I don't know why she did it—I've often wondered—but there *are* people in the world who take a pleasure in spoiling the joy of others.

"I didn't tell Johnston but resolved when an opportunity came to stand up with him before an ordained minister. It came sooner than I hoped. Not six weeks after we were man and wife a 'missioner' made a tour through the mining camps of that part of the state. He would not come to ours—we were too small and distant—so I begged my husband to go to him, tell him our case and bring him back. It would have been better for us both to have gone, but I was sick—too young and ignorant to know the cause of my illness—and Johnston, who seemed

willing to do anything I wanted, agreed.

"We calculated that the trip—on horseback, over half-cut mountain trails—would take three or four days there and back. At the end of the fifth day he had not returned and I was in a fever of anxiety. Then again that woman came to me with her poisoned words: I was not a legal wife; could he, knowing this, have taken the opportunity to desert me? God pity her for the deadly harm she did. Sick, alone, inexperienced, eaten into by horrible doubts, I waited till two weeks had passed. Then I was sure that he had done as she said—left me.

"I won't go over that—the past is past. I took what money I had and made my way to the railway. From there by slow stages, for by this time I was ill in mind and body, I got as far as St. Louis, where, my money gone, unable to work, I wrote to an uncle of my mother's, a doctor, whom I had never seen but of whom she had often spoken to me.

"Men like him make us realize there is a God to inspire, a Heaven to reward. He came at once, took me to his home in Indiana, and nursed me back to health. He was a father to me, more than a father to the child I had. No one knew me there—no one but he ever heard my story. I took a new name, from a distant branch of his family, and passed as a widow. When my little girl was old enough to understand I told her her father had died before she was born.

"We lived there for twenty-four years. Before the end of that time the name of Johnston Barker rose into prominence. My uncle hated it—would not allow it mentioned in his presence. When he died three years ago, he left us all he had—fifty thousand dollars, a great fortune to us. Then Carol, who had chafed at the narrow life of a small town, persuaded me to come to New York. I had no fear of meeting Barker, our paths would never cross, and to please her was my life.

"She is not like me, fearful and timid, but full of daring and ambition. When the farm we bought in New Jersey suddenly increased in value and the land scheme was suggested, she wanted to try it. At first it wasn't possible as we hadn't enough money. It was not until she met Mr. Harland at a friend's house in Azalea, that the plan became feasible for he was taken with the idea at once. After visiting the farm a few times, and talking it over with her, he offered to come in as a silent partner, putting up the capital.

"The move to town alarmed me. There, in business, she might run across the man who was her father—and this is exactly what happened. You've seen my daughter—you know what she is. Looking at me now you may not realize that she is extraordinarily like what I was when Johnston Barker married me.

"He saw her first in the elevator at the Black Eagle Building. Men always noticed her—she was used to it—but that night she told me laughing of the old

man who had stared at her in the elevator, stared and stared and couldn't take his eyes off. My heart warned me, and when I heard her description I knew who he was and why he stared.

"After that there was no peace for me. I had a haunting terror that he would find out who she was and might try to claim her. This increased when she told me of his visit to her office to buy the lot—an excuse I understood—and his questions about her former home. Then I tried to quiet myself with the assurances that he could not possibly guess—he had never heard the name of Whitehall in connection with me, he had never known a child was expected.

"But a night came when I was put with my back against the wall. She returned from work, gay and excited, saying Mr. Barker had been in the office that afternoon and asked her if he might call and meet her mother. The terrible agitation that threw me into betrayed me. I couldn't evade her eyes or her questions, and I told her. She was horrified, stunned. I can't tell you what she said—I can only make you understand her feelings by saying she loved me as few daughters love their mothers.

"After that—ah, it was horrible! She tried to cancel the sale, but he—of course, he was angry and puzzled by the change in her, could make nothing out of it, and finally insisted on knowing what had happened. There was no escape for her and taking him into the private office they had an interview in which he forced the truth from her.

"Johnston Barker's life has been full of great things, triumphs and conquests. But I think that hour in the Azalea Woods Estates office must have been the crowning one of his career. To hear that Carol, my wonderful Carol, was his child! He had had no suspicion of it until then. He told her he had been interested by her strange likeness to me, had thought she might be some distant connection, who could give him news of his lost wife.

"For—here is the bitter part of it—he *had* come back. In that long mountain journey an accident, a fall from his horse, had injured him. He had been found unconscious by a party of miners who had taken him to their camp and cared for him. For two weeks he lay at death's door, no one knowing who he was, or understanding the wanderings of his delirium. When he returned I was gone—lost like a raindrop in the ocean. He was too poor to hire the aid that might have found me then. He went back to his work, moved to other camps, struggled and thrived. In time the story of his marriage was forgotten. Those who remembered it set it down as an illegal connection, a familiar incident in the miner's roving life.

"Years later, when he grew rich he hunted for me, but it was too late. Then he turned his whole attention to business, flung himself into it. The making of

money filled his life, became his life till he saw the girl in the elevator, who so strikingly resembled the woman he had loved in his youth.

"This was what he told Carol and this she believed. She was convinced of the truth of every word and tried to convince me. But I was full of suspicions. Having found himself the father of such a girl might he not go to any lengths to gain her love and confidence? His life was empty, he was lonely, Carol would have been the consolation and pride of his old age. Gentlemen—" she looked at the listening faces—"can you blame me? A youth blasted, years of brooding bitterness—might not that make a woman incredulous and slow to trust again?

"When she saw the way I took it she went about the business of proving it. Through a lawyer she learned that contract marriages at that time in that state were valid. I *had* been Johnston Barker's wife and she was legitimate. But I hung back. Many things moved me. He wanted to acknowledge us, take us to live with him and I shrank from all that publicity and clamor. Also—I am telling everything—I think I was jealous of him, fearful that he might take from me some of the love which had made my life possible.

"I knew she saw him often, and that she heard from him by letter. All through the end of December and the early part of January she urged and pleaded with me. And finally I gave in—I had to, I couldn't stand between her and what he could give her—and the day came when I consented to see him. That day was the fifteenth of January."

George cleared his throat and O'Mally stirred uneasily in his chair. The old man rumbled an encouraging "fifteenth of January," and she went on:

"She left in the morning greatly excited, telling me she would phone him that she had good news and would bring him home with her that evening. She was radiant with joy and hope when I kissed her good-bye. When she returned that night—long after her usual time—all that hope and joy were dashed to the ground.

"As you know, she did see him that afternoon and told him of my consent. He appeared overjoyed and said he would come, but first must go to Mr. Harland's offices on the floor above to talk over a matter of great importance. This, he said, would probably occupy half to three-quarters of an hour, after which he would return to her. As they wished to avoid all possibility of gossip through her clerks or the people in the building, they decided not to meet in her offices, but in the church which is next door. From there they would take a cab and come to me.

"The appointment was for a quarter-past six. Carol was ahead of time and waited for him over an hour, then came home, shattered, broken, almost unable to speak—for, as you know, he never came."

She paused, her face tragic with the memory of that last, unexpected blow. No one spoke, and looking round at them, she threw out her hands with a gesture of pleading appeal:

"What could I think? Was it unnatural for me to disbelieve him again? Hasn't all that's come out shown he was what I'd already found him—false to his word and his trust?"

"Does your daughter think that, too?" asked the chief.

"No. She believes in him, even now, with him in hiding and branded as a traitor. But that's Carol—always ready to trust where her heart is. She says it's all right, that he'll come back and clear himself, but I can see how she's suffering, how she's struggling to keep her hopes alive."

I burst out—wild horses couldn't have kept me quiet any longer. Reaching a long arm across the table, without any consciousness that I was doing it, I laid my hand on Mrs. Whitehall's:

"How did she get out of the building that night?"

She looked surprised, and strangely enough embarrassed.

"Why—why—" she stammered, and then suddenly, "you seem to know so much here—do you know anything about Mr. Harland and Carol?"

"Something," said the chief guardedly.

"Everything," I shot out, not caring for her, or him, or the case, or anything but the answer to my question.

"Then I don't mind telling you, though Carol wouldn't like it." She glanced tentatively at me. "Did you know he was in love with her?"

"All about it. Yes. Go on—"

"She went down by the stairs, all those flights, to avoid him. I guessed the way he felt about her. I knew it soon after the business was started and told her but she only laughed at me. That afternoon, when he came to her office, she saw I was right. Not that he said anything definite, but by his manner, the questions he asked her. He was wrought up and desperate, I suppose, and let her see that he was jealous of Mr. Barker, demanding the truth, whether she loved him, whether she intended marrying him. She was angry, but seeing that he had lost control of himself, told him that her feeling for Mr. Barker was that of a daughter to a father and never would be anything else. That seemed to quiet him and he went away.

"When she was leaving her offices she heard foot-steps on the floor above and looking up saw him through the balustrade walking to the stair head. She at once thought he was coming to see her and not wanting any more conversation with him, stole out and down the hall to the side corridor, where the service stairs are. Her intention was to pick up the elevator on the floor below, but on second

thoughts she gave this up and walked the whole way. Finding her gone he would probably take the elevator himself and they might meet in the car or the entrance hall. Of course we know now she was all wrong. It was not to see her he was coming down, it was to make up his mind to die."

My actions must have surprised them. For without a word to Mrs. Whitehall I jumped up and left the room—I couldn't trust myself to speak, I had to be alone. In my own office I shut the door and stood looking with eyes that saw nothing out of the window, over the roofs to where the waters of the bay glittered in the sun. Have you ever felt a relief so great it made you shaky? Probably not—but wait till you're in the position I was. The room rocked, the distance was a golden blue as I whispered with lips that were stiff and dry:

"Thank God! Oh, thank God! Oh, thank God!"

I don't know how long a time passed—maybe an hour, maybe five minutes—when the door opened and George's head was thrust in:

"What are you doing shut in here? Get a move on—we want you. The telephone returns have come."

I followed him back. Mrs. Whitehall was not there—the chief and O'Mally had their heads together over a slip of paper.

"Here you, Jack," said the old man turning sharply on me. "You've got to go out tonight with O'Mally. They're in Quebec."

He handed me the slip of paper. On it was one memorandum. The night before at 12.05 New York, Lenox 1360 had called up Quebec, St. Foy 584.





# CHAPTER XIX

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

That night Babbitts, O'Mally and I left for Quebec. Before we went the wires that connected us with the Canadian city had been busy. St. Foy 584 had been located, a house on a suburban road, occupied for the last two weeks by an American called Henry Santley. Instructions were carried over the hundreds of intervening miles to surround the house, to apprehend Santley if he tried to get away, and to watch for the lady who would join him that night. Unless something unforeseen and unimaginable should occur we had Barker at last.

As we rushed through the darkness, we speculated on the reasons for his last daring move—the sending for his daughter. O'Mally figured it out as the result of a growing confidence—he was feeling secure and wanted to help her. He had had ample proof of her discretion and had probably some plan for her enrichment that he wanted to communicate to her in person. I was of the opinion that he expected to leave the country and intended to take her with him, sending back later for the mother. He was assured of her trust and affection, knew she believed in him, and was certain the murder hadn't been and now never would be discovered. He could count on safety in Europe and with his vast gains could settle down with his wife and his daughter to a life of splendid ease. Well, we'd see to *that*. The best laid schemes of mice and men!

The sun was bright, the sky sapphire clear as the great rock of Quebec, crowned with its fortress roofs, came into view. The two rivers clasped its base, ice-banded at the shore and in the middle their dark currents flowing free. Snow and snow and snow heaved and billowed on the surrounding hills, paved the narrow streets, hooded the roofs of the ancient houses. Through the air, razor-edged with cold and crystal clear, came the thin broken music of sleigh bells, ringing up

from every lane and alley, jubilant and inspiring, and the sleighs, low running, flew by with the wave of their streaming furs and the flash of scarlet standards.

Glorious, splendid, a fit day, all sun and color and music, for me to come to Carol!

A man met us at the depot, a silent, wooden-faced policeman of some kind, who said yes, he thought the lady was there, and then piloted us glumly into a sleigh and mounted beside the driver. A continuous, vague current of sound came from Babbitts and O'Mally as we climbed a steep hill with the Frontenac's pinnacled towers looming above us and then shot off down narrow streets where the jingle of the bells was flung back and across, echoing and reverberating between the old stone houses. It made me think of a phrase the boys in the office used, "coming with bells!"

We went some distance through the town and out along a road, where the buildings drew apart from one another, villas and suburban houses behind walls and gardens. At a smaller one, set back in a muffling of whitened shrubberies, the sleigh drew in toward the sidewalk. Before the others could disentangle themselves from the furs and robes, I was out and racing up the path.

My eyes, ranging hungrily over the house, thinking perhaps to see her at one of the windows, saw in it something ominous and secretive. There was not a sign of life, every pane darkened with a lowered blind. All about it the snow was heaped and curled in wave-like forms as if endeavoring to creep over it, to aid in the work of hiding its dark mystery. Barker's lair, his last stand! It looked like it, white wrapped, silent, inscrutable.

As I leaped up the piazza steps the door was opened by a man in uniform. He touched his hat and started to speak, but I pushed him aside and came in peering past him down a hall that stretched away to the rear. At the sound of his voice a door had opened there and a woman came out. For a moment she was only a shadow moving toward me up the dimness of the half-lit passage. Then I recognized her, gave a cry and ran to her.

My hands found hers and closed on them, my eyes looking down into the dark ones raised to them. Neither of us spoke, it didn't occur to me to explain why I was there and she showed no surprise at seeing me. It seemed as if we'd known all along we were going to meet in that dark passage in that strange house. And standing there silent, hand clasped in hand, I saw something so wonderful, so unexpected, that the surroundings faded away and for me there was nothing in the world but what I read in her beautiful, lifted face.

I never had dared to hope, never had thought of her as caring for me. All I had asked was the right to help and defend her. Perhaps under different cir-

cumstances, when things were happy and easy, I'd have aspired, gone in to try and win. But in the last dark month, when we'd come so close, we'd only been a woman set upon and menaced, and a man braced and steeled to do battle for her. Now, with her stone-cold hands in mine, I saw in the shining depths of her eyes—Oh, no, it's too sacred. That part of the story is between Carol and me.

There had been sounds and voices in the vestibule behind us. They came vaguely upon my consciousness, low and then breaking suddenly into a louder key, phrases, exclamations, questions. I don't think if the house had been rocked by an earthquake I'd have noticed it, and it wasn't till O'Mally came down the passage calling me, that I dropped her hands and turned. His face was creased into an expression of excited consternation, and he rapped out, not seeing Carol:

"What the devil are you doing there? Haven't you heard?" Then his eye catching her, "Oh, it's Miss Whitehall. Well, young lady, you must have had a pretty tough time here last night."

She simply drooped her eyelids in faint agreement.

"What do you mean?" I cried, and looked from O'Mally's boisterously concerned countenance to Carol's worn, white one. "What is it, something more?"

She gave a slight nod and said:

"The last—the end this time."

O'Mally wheeled on me:

"She hasn't told you. He shot himself—here, last night, shortly after she arrived."

Before I had time to answer, Babbitts and the man in uniform, a police inspector, were beside us. Babbitts was speechless—as I was myself—but the inspector, pompous and stolid, answered my look of shocked amazement:

"A few minutes after one. Fortunately I'd got your instructions and the house was surrounded. My men heard the report and the screams and broke in at once."

I looked blankly from one to the other. There was a confused horror in my mind, but from the confusion one thought rose clear—Barker had done the best, the only thing.

The inspector, ostentatiously cool in the midst of our aghast concern, volunteered further:

"He didn't die till near morning and we got a full statement out of him. For an hour afterward he was as clear as a bell—they are that way sometimes—and gave us all the particulars, seemed to want to. I've got it upstairs and from what I can make out he was one of the sharpest, most daring criminals I ever ran up against. I've had the body kept here for your identification. Will you come up and

see it now?"

He moved off toward the stairs. O'Mally and Babbitts, muttering together, filing after him. I didn't go but turned to Carol, who had thrust one hand through the balustrade that ran up beside where we were standing. As the tramp of ascending feet sounded on the first steps, she leaned toward me, her voice hardly more than a whisper:

"Do you know who it is?"

"Who what is?" I said, startled by her words and expression.

"The man upstairs?"

I was terror-stricken—the experiences of the night had unhinged her mind. I tried to take her hand, but she drew it back, her lips forming words just loud enough for me to hear:

"You don't. It's Hollings Harland."

"Carol!" I cried, certain now she was unbalanced.

She drew farther away from me and slipping her hand from the balustrade pointed up the stairs:

"Go and see. It's he. There's nothing the matter with me, but I want you to see for yourself. Go and see and then come back here and I'll tell you. I know everything now."

I went, a wild rush up the stairs. In a room off the upper hall, the light tempered by drawn blinds, were O'Mally, Babbitts and the inspector, looking at the dead body of Hollings Harland.

# CHAPTER XX

## JACK TELLS THE STORY

When I came down she was waiting for me. With a finger against her lips in a command for silence, she turned and went along the passage to the door from which I had seen her enter. I followed her and catching up with her as she placed her hand on the knob, burst out:

"What is it—what *does* it mean? Where's Barker? In the name of Heaven tell me quickly what *has* happened?"

"I'll tell you in here," she said softly, and opening the door preceded me into the room.

It was evidently the dining-room of the house, a round table standing in the center, a sideboard with glass and china on it against the wall. A coal fire burned in the grate, and the blinds were raised showing the dazzling glitter of the snow outside. It was warm and bright, the one place in that sinister house that seemed to have a human note about it. She passed round the table to the fire and, standing there, made a gesture that swept the walls and unveiled windows:

"Last night in this room I at last understood the tragedy in which we've all been involved."

I stood like a post, still too bemused to have any questions ready. There were too many to ask. It was like a skein so tangled there was no loose thread to start with.

"Did you know Harland was here when you came?" was what I finally said. She nodded:

"I suspected it on Sunday afternoon. I was certain of it on Sunday night before I left New York." She dropped into a chair by the fire, and pointed me to one near-by at the table. "Sit down and let me tell it to you as it happened to me,

my side of it. When you've heard that, you can read the statement he gave, then you'll see it all. Straight from its beginning to its awful end here last night."

Before she began I told her of our interview with Mrs. Whitehall and that we knew her true relationship to Barker.

She seemed relieved and asked if her mother had also told us of her position with regard to Harland. When she saw how fully we'd been informed she gave a deep sigh and said:

"Now you can understand why I prevaricated that day in Mr. Whitney's office. I was trying to shield my father, to help him any way I could. Oh, if I'd known the truth then or you had—the truth you don't know even yet! It was Johnston Barker that was murdered and Hollings Harland who murdered him!"

I started forward, but she raised a silencing hand, her voice shaken and pleading:

"Don't, please, say anything. Let me go on in my own way. It's so hard to tell." She dropped the hand to its fellow and holding them tight-clenched in her lap, said slowly: "If my mother told you of that conversation I had with Mr. Harland you know what I discovered then—that he loved me. I never suspected it before, but when he pressed me with questions about Johnston Barker, so unlike himself, vehement and excited, I understood and was sorry for him. I told him as much as I could then, explained my feeling for the man he was jealous of without telling my relationship, said how I respected and trusted him, what any girl might say of her father. He seemed relieved but went on to ask if Mr. Barker and I were not interested in some scheme, some undertaking of a secret nature. *That* frightened me, it sounded as if he had found out about us, had been told something by someone. Taken by surprise, I answered with a half truth, that Mr. Barker *had* a plan on foot for my welfare, that he wanted to help me and my mother to a better financial position, but that I was not yet at liberty to tell what it was. I saw he thought I meant business, and as I go on, you'll see how that information gave him the confidence to do what he did later.

"I know now that the Whitney office discovered I had had a letter from Mr. Barker mailed from Toronto asking me to join him there and that I agreed to do so in a phone message that same day. That letter, directed to my office, was in typewriting and was signed with my father's initials. It was short, merely telling me that there was a reason for his disappearance which he would explain to me, that his whereabouts must be kept secret, and that he wanted me to come to him to make arrangements for a new business venture in which he hoped to set me up. As you know I attempted to do what he asked, and was followed by two men from the Whitney office."

"How do you know all this?" I couldn't help butting in.

She gave a slight smile, the first I had seen on her face:

"I'll tell you that later—it's not the least curious part of my story. Realizing by the papers that there was a general hue and cry for him I was very cautious, much more so than your detectives thought. I saw them, decided the move was too dangerous, and came back. At that time, and for some time afterward, I believed that letter was from my father."

"Wasn't it?"

She shook her head:

"No—but wait. I had no other letter and no other communication of any sort. I searched the papers for any news of him, thinking he might put something for me in the personal columns, but there was not a sign. Days passed that way, my business was closed and I had time to think, and the more I thought the more strange and inexplicable it seemed. Why, in the letter, had he made no reference to the broken engagement, so vital to both of us, that night in the church. Why had he said nothing about my mother whose state of mind he would have guessed?"

"From the first I had suspicions that something was wrong. I could not believe he would have done what they said he had. Even after I read in the papers of his carefully planned get-away I was not convinced. After that scene in the Whitney office, when I saw you were all watching me, eager to trip me into any admission, my suspicions grew stronger. There was more than showed on the surface. I sensed it, an instinct warned me.

"As days passed and I heard nothing more from him, the conviction grew that something had happened to him. If it was accident I was certain it would have been known; if, as many thought, he'd lost his memory and strayed away, I was equally certain he'd have been seen and recognized. What else could it be? Can you picture me, shut up with my poor distracted mother, ravaged by fear and anxiety? Those waiting days—how terrible they were—with that sense of dread always growing, growing. Finally it came to a climax. If my father was dead as I thought, there was only one explanation—foul play. On Friday, when you came to see me, I was at the breaking point, afraid to speak, desperate for help and unable to ask for it.

"Now I come to the day when I learned everything, when all these broken forebodings of disaster fell together like the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope and took a definite shape. It was Sunday, can it be only two days ago? My mother had moved to the cottage and I was alone in the apartment packing up to follow her. About the middle of the afternoon while I was hard at work the telephone rang. I answered it and was told by the operator Long Distance was calling me,

Quebec. At that my heart gave a great jump of joy and relief—my father was alive and sending for me again. It was like the wireless answer of help to a foundering vessel.

"You know how often the Long Distance connection varies—one day you can recognize a voice a thousand miles off that on the next you can't make out at a hundred? The voice that had spoken to me from Toronto was no more than a vibration of the wire, thin and toneless. The one that spoke from Quebec was distinct and colored with a personality.

"The first words were that it was J. W. B. and at these words, as if the receiver had shot an electric current into me, I started and grew tense, for it did not sound like the voice of J. W. B. It went on, explaining why he had not communicated with me, and how he now again wanted me to come to him. I, listening, became more and more sure that the person speaking was not my father, but that, whoever he was, his voice stirred a faint memory, was dimly suggestive of a voice I *did* know.

"I was confused and agitated, standing there with the receiver at my ear, while those sentences ran over the wire, every syllable clear and distinct. Then, suddenly, I thought of a way I could find out. My father was the only man in the world who knew of our secret, of the plan for our reunion. A simple question would test the knowledge of the person talking to me. When he had finished I said:

"I've been longing to hear from you, not only for myself but for my mother—she's been in despair.'

"There was a slight pause before the voice answered:

"Why should Mrs. Whitehall be so disturbed?"

"Then I *knew* it wasn't Johnston Barker. The reason for Mrs. Whitehall's disturbance was as well known to him as it was to me. Besides in our talks together he had never alluded to her as 'Mrs. Whitehall' but always as 'your mother' or by her Christian name, Serena.

"I said the mystery of his disappearance had upset her, she was afraid something had happened to him. A faint laugh—with again that curiously familiar echo in it—came along the wire:

"You can set her mind at rest after you've seen me.'

"There was something ghastly about it—talking to this unknown being, listening to that whispering voice that called me to come and wasn't the voice I knew. It was like an evil spirit, close to me but invisible, and that I had no power to lay hold of.

"While I was thinking this he was telling me that he had a safe hiding place and that I must join him at once, the plans were now perfected for the new en-



terprise in which he was to launch me. I demurred and to gain time told him how I'd tried to go before and been followed. That caught his attention at once, his questions came quick and eager. Perhaps before that he had tried to disguise his voice, anyway now the familiar note in it grew stronger. I began to catch at something—inflexions, accent—till suddenly, like a runner who rounds a corner and sees his goal unexpectedly before him, my memory saw a name—Harland!

"I was so amazed, so staggered that for a moment I couldn't speak. The voice brought me back, saying sharply, 'Are you there?' I stammered a reply and said I couldn't make up my mind to come. He urged, but I wouldn't promise, till at length, feeling I might betray myself, I said I'd think it over and let him know later. He had to be satisfied with that and gave me his telephone number telling me to call him up as soon as I decided.

"What did I feel as I sat alone in that dismantled place? Can you realize the state of my thoughts? What did it mean—what was going on? The man was not Johnston Barker, but how could he be Harland, who was dead and buried? Ah, if you had come *then* instead of Friday I'd have told you for I was in waters too deep for me. All that I could grasp was that I was in the midst of something incomprehensible and terrible, from the darkness of which one thought stood out—my father had never sent for me, I had never heard from him—it had been this other man all along! I was then as certain as if his spirit had appeared before me that Johnston Barker was dead.

"And now I come to one of the strangest and finest things that ever happened to me in my life. Late on Sunday night a girl—unknown to me and refusing to give her name—came and told me of the murder, the whole of it, the evidence against me, and that I stood in danger of immediate arrest."

I jumped to my feet—I couldn't believe it:

"A girl—what kind of a girl?"

"Young and pretty, with dark brown eyes and brown curly hair. Oh, I can place her for you. She said she had been employed to help get the information against me and my father, and was the only woman acting in that capacity."

"Molly!" I gasped, falling back into my chair. "Molly Babbitts! What in Heaven's name—"

"You're right to invoke Heaven's name, for it was Heaven that sent her. She wouldn't tell me who she was or why she came, but I could see. What reason could there have been except that she believed me innocent and wanted to help me escape?"

For a moment I couldn't speak. I dropped my head and a silent oath went up from me to hold Molly sacred forever more. I could see it all—she'd found her

heart, realized the cruelty of what was to be done, discovered in some way she'd given me wrong information, and done the thing herself. The gallant, noble little soul! God bless her! God bless her!

Carol went on:

"I wonder now what she thought of me. I must have appeared utterly extraordinary to her. She thought she was telling me what I already knew, or at least knew something of. But as I sat there listening to her I was piecing together in my mind what she was saying with what I myself had found out. I was building up a complete story, fitting new and old together, and it held me dumb, motionless, as if I didn't care. It would take too long to tell you how I got at the main facts—the smaller points I didn't think of. It was as if what she said and what I knew jumped toward each other like the flame and the igniting gas, connecting the broken bits into a continuous line of fire. I knew that murder had been committed. I knew that the body was unrecognizable. I knew that had my father been living I would have heard from him. I knew that the voice on the phone was Harland's. Without all the details she gave me it would have been enough. Before she had finished my mind had grasped the truth. It was Johnston Barker who had been murdered and Harland—trying now to draw me to him—was the murderer.

"Do you guess what a flame of rage burst up in me—what a passion to trap and bring to justice the man who could conceive and execute such a devilish thing? I could hardly wait to go. I was too wrought up to think out a reasonable course. Looking back on it today it seems like an act of madness, but I suppose a person in that state is half mad. I never thought of getting anybody to go with me, of applying to the police. I only saw myself finding Harland and accusing him. It's inconceivable—the irrational action of a woman beside herself with grief and fury.

"I called up the number he'd given me and told him I was coming on the first train I could catch. He told me at what hour that morning it would leave New York and when it would reach Quebec. He said he would send his servant, a French woman, to meet me at the depot as he didn't like to risk going himself. Then I left the house and went to the Grand Central Station, where I sat in the women's waiting room for the rest of the night.

"I did not get to Quebec till after midnight. The servant met me, put me in a sleigh that was waiting for us, and together we drove here.

"The house was lit up, every lower window bright. As we walked up the path from the gate I saw a man moving behind the shrubbery and called her attention to him. While she was opening the door with her key I noticed another loitering along the footpath by the gate, obviously watching us. This time I asked her why there should be men about at such an hour and on such a freezing night. She

seemed bewildered and frightened, muttering something in French about having noticed them when she went out. In the hallway she directed me to a room on the upper floor, telling me, when I was ready, to go down to the dining-room where supper was waiting.

"I went upstairs and she followed, showing me where I was to go and then walking down the passage to another room. As I took off my wraps and hat I could hear her voice, loud and excited, telling someone of the two men we had seen. Another voice answered it—a man's—but pitched too low for me to make out the words.

"When I was ready I went downstairs and into the room. No one was about, there was not a sound. The fire was burning as it is now, the curtains drawn, and the table, set out with a supper, was brightly lit with candles and decorated with flowers. I stood here by the fire waiting, white, I suppose, as the tablecloth, for I was at the highest climax of excitement a human being can reach and keep her senses.

"Suddenly I heard steps on the stairs. I turned and made ready, moistening my lips which were stiff and felt like leather. The steps came down the passage—the door opened. There he was!

"That first second, when he entered as the lover and conqueror, he looked splendid. The worn and harassed air he had the last time I'd seen him was gone. He was at the highest pinnacle of his life, 'the very butt and sea mark of his sail,' and it was as if his spirit recognized it and flashed up in a last illuminating glow of fire and force.

"He was prepared for amazement, horror, probably fear from me. The first shock he received was my face, showing none of these, quiet, and, I suppose, fierce with the hatred I felt. He stopped dead in the doorway, the confidence stricken out of him—just staring. Then he stammered:

"'Carol—you—you—'

"He was too astounded to say any more. I finished for him, my voice low and hoarse:

"'You think I didn't expect to see you. I did. I knew you were here—I came to find you. I came to tell you that I know how you killed Johnston Barker.'

"I don't think anyone has ever said he lacked courage. He was one of those bold and ruthless beings that came to their fullest flower during the Italian Renaissance—terrible and tremendous too. I've thought of him since as like one of the Borgias or Iago transplanted to our country and modern times. When he saw that I knew he went white, but he stood with the light of the candles bright on his ghastly face, straight and steady as a soldier before the cannon.

"Johnston Barker,' he said very quietly—'killed him? You bring me interesting news. I didn't know he was dead!'

"As I've told you I had come without plans, with no line of action decided upon. Now the futility, the blind rashness of what I had done was borne in upon me. His stoney calm, his measured voice, showed me I was pitted against an antagonist whose strength was to mine as a lion's to a mouse. The thought maddened me, I was ready to say anything to break him, to conquer and crush him and in my desperation—guided by some flash of intuition—I said the right thing:

"Oh, don't waste time denying it. It's too late for that now. It's not I alone who knows—they know in New York—everything. How you did it, how you stole away, and where you are now. The net is around you—they've got you. There's no use any more in lies and tricks, for you can't escape them.'

"He had listened without a movement or a sign of agitation. But when I finished he straightened his shoulders and throwing up his head sent a glance of piercing question over the curtained windows. His whole being suggested something arrested and fiercely alert, not fear, but a wild concentration of energy, as if all his forces were aroused to meet a desperate call.

"Then suddenly he made a step forward, leaned across the table and spoke. I can't tell you all he said. It was so horrible and his face—it was like a demon's in its death throes! But it was about his love for me—that he'd done it all for me—that he could give me more than any woman ever had before—lay the world at my feet. And to come with him—now—we could get away—we had time yet. Oh!" she closed her eyes and shuddered at the memory—"I can't go on. He knew it was hopeless, he must have known then what the men outside meant. It was the last defiance—the last mad hope.

"And *then* I conquered him, not as I'd meant to do, not with any intention. All the horror and loathing I felt came out in what I said. Terrible words—how I hated him—all that had been locked up in me since I'd known the truth. His face grew so dreadful that I shrank back in this corner, and finally to hide it, hid my own in my hands.

"People do such strange things in life, not at all like what they do in books and plays. When I stopped speaking he said nothing, and dropping my hands I looked at him, not knowing what I'd see. He was standing very quiet, gazing straight in front of him, like a man thinking—deeply thinking, lost in thought.

"We were that way for a moment, so still you could hear the clock ticking, then, without a word or look at me, he turned and went out of the room.

"I was so paralyzed by the scene that for a space I stood where he'd left me, squeezed into the angle behind the mantelpiece, stunned and senseless. Then the

sound of his feet on the stairs called me back to life. He was going, he was running away. I did not know myself then who the men outside were and thought he could easily make his escape.

"I ran out into the hall, calling to the French woman. She came, out of a door somewhere in the back part of the house, and I have a queer impression of her face by the light of a bracket lamp, almost ludicrous in its expression of fright. As I ran up the stairs I screamed to her to come, to follow me, and heard her steps racing along the passage and her panting exclamations of terror. At the stair head my ear caught the snap of a closing door and the click of a key turned in a lock. It came from the darkened end of the hall and as I ran down I cried to the woman, 'Get someone. Call. Get help.' Then and there she threw up a window and thrusting out her head screamed into the darkness, '*Au secours! Au secours!*'"

"A man's voice, close under the window, answered her and she flew past me to another staircase beyond in the darkness down which I could hear her clattering rush. Then there were the sound of steps, and the breaking of wood, sharp tearing noises mixed with the shouts of men. It all came together, for as I stood outside that locked door, listening to the woman's cries and the smashing of the wood below, sharp as a flash came the report of a pistol from the closed room.

"That's all. I didn't see him again, I couldn't. The police inspector—they've all been very kind, have done everything for me they could—let me see the statement. When you've read that you'll know everything—it'll be the last chapter. I can't tell it to you—it's more than I can bear."

She glanced at me and then suddenly looked away for tears, quick and unexpected, welled into her eyes. She put up one hand, pressing it against her eyelids, while the other lay still on the table. I leaned forward and laid mine over it. As she sat speechless, struggling with her moment of weakness, I looked at the two hands—mine big and hard and brown, almost hid hers, closing round it, sheltering and guarding it, as my life, if God willed it, would close round and shelter and guard hers.

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I am coming to the end of my part of the story and it's only up to me now to give the final explanation—furnished by Harland's statement—of the strangest crime that had ever come within the ken of the Whitney office.

We all read the statement that day and that night in our sitting-room at the Frontenac, O'Mally, Babbitts and I talked it over. A good deal had to be supplemented by our own inside information. For anyone who had not our fuller knowledge there would have been many broken links in the chain. But to us it read as a clear, consecutive sequence of events. One thing I drew from it—almost

as if Harland had told me himself—its unconscious revelation of the development in him of sinister possibilities that had lain dormant during the struggle of his early years. In middle life, his world conquered, two master passions, love of gain and love of a woman, had seized him, and swept him to his ruin.

I won't give it in his words, but in as plain and short a narrative as I can.

Harland had been the welcher in the Copper Pool and Barker had suspected him. This was the immediate cause of the murder. Back of that, the root from which the whole intricate crime grew, was his love of Carol Whitehall and determination to make her his wife.

Briefly outlined, his position with regard to her was as follows. His passion for her had started with the inauguration of the land company, but while she was grateful and friendly, he soon saw that she was nothing more. So he kept his counsel, making no attempt by word or look to disturb the harmony of their relations. But while he maintained the pose of a business partner he studied her and saw that she was ambitious, large in her aims, and aspiring. This side of her character was the one he decided to lay siege to. If he could not win her heart, he would amass a fortune and tempt her with its vast possibilities. His membership in the Copper Pool gave him the opportunity, and he saw himself able to lay millions at her feet.

On January fifth, he met Barker on the street and in the course of a short conversation learned that the head of the pool suspected his treachery. That half-expressed suspicion, with its veiled hint of publicity, planted the seed of murder in his mind.

It was not, however, till two days later that the seed sprouted. How his idea came to him indicated the condition of morbidly acute perception and wild recklessness he had reached. Walking up Fifth Avenue after dark he had seen a man standing under a lamp, lighting a pipe. The man, Joseph Sammis, was so like Barker, that he moved nearer to address him. A closer view showed him his mistake, but also showed him that Sammis, feeble in health, shabby and impoverished, was sufficiently like Barker to pass for him.

From that resemblance his idea expanded still further. He followed Sammis to his lodgings, had a conference with him, and told him he had work in Philadelphia which he wanted Sammis to undertake. The man, down to his last dollar, flattered and amazed at his good fortune, agreed at once. Though the work had not developed, it was necessary for Sammis to be on the ground and stay there awaiting instructions. Money was given him for proper clothes and an advance of salary. The date when he was to leave would be communicated to him within a few days. It would appear that Sammis never knew his benefactor's real name,

but accepted the luck that came to him eagerly and without question. In *his* case the chief had guessed right—he was a "plant."

From this point the plot mushroomed out into its full dimensions. Harland and Barker were of a size, small, light and wiry, both men had gray hair and dark eyes. The features obliterated, clothes, personal papers and jewelry would be the only means of identification. The back office with its one egress through the other rooms was selected as the scene of the crime. Barker's body could be lowered from the cleat—tried and tested—to the floor below. Through his acquaintance with Ford and Miss Whitehall, Harland was familiar with the hours of the Azalea Woods Estates people. They would be gone when he went down, entered their office with the pass key he had procured, and made the change of clothing with his victim. His own disguise was a very simple matter. Through an acquaintance with actors in his youth he had learned their method of building up the nose by means of an adhesive paste—that and the white mustache were all he needed. He took one chance and one only—a gambler's risk—that the body might not be sufficiently crushed to escape recognition. This chance, as we know, went his way.

Gone thus far he had only to wait his opportunity. Against that he bought and concealed the rope, the blackjack for the blow, and the articles for his own transformation—all the properties of the grisly drama he was about to stage.

Meantime his scheme to win Carol was working out less successfully and the strain was wearing on him. On January fifteenth, his nerves stretched to the breaking point, he went to her determined to find out how she stood with Barker. Her answer satisfied him. He knew her to be truthful and when she told him she had no other than a filial affection for the magnate he believed her. The information she gave about Barker's intention of helping her, of having plans afoot for her future welfare, he seized upon and subsequently used.

He also, in that interview, learned that she had had a phone message from the magnate saying he was coming to her office that afternoon and would later go to the floor above to see Mr. Harland. When he heard this he knew that his time had come.

From her he went straight to a telephone booth, called up Barker's garage and gave Heney the instructions to meet him that night and take him to the Elizabeth Depot. That done he returned to the Black Eagle Building, saw that his stenographer and clerk were disposed to his satisfaction, and made ready for the final event.

The quarrel with Barker was genuine. The head of the Copper Pool burst into accusations of treachery and threatened immediate exposure. Sitting at the desk, engrossed in his anger, he did not notice Harland slip behind him. One blow

of the blackjack delivered below the temple resulted in death, as instantaneous as it was noiseless. Fastening the rope about the body, Harland swung it from the cleat to the floor below, where in the darkness it would have been invisible at a distance of ten feet.

He then passed through the outer offices and went downstairs. He must have missed Carol by a few seconds. His knock being unanswered, he let himself in with his pass key, and walked through to the back room. Here he drew in the body, then curtaining the window, turned on the lights and effected the change of clothes, shaving off the mustache, and looking for the scarf pin which he couldn't find. He had just completed this when Ford entered—a terrible moment for him.

When Ford left his nerve was shaken and he realized he must finish the job at once. After he had done so he went back to the private office, carefully arranged his own disguise, and after waiting for over an hour, put on Barker's hat and coat and went down the service stairs.

He met no person or obstacle, skirted the back of the block and picked up Heney at the place designated. At the Elizabeth Station he bought a ticket to Philadelphia, but when he saw his chance, crossed the lines to the Jersey Central platform and boarded a local for Jersey City, from which by a devious route he made his way to Canada. It was in the waiting-room at the Jersey City depot that he removed his disguise.

In Toronto he sublet a small apartment, only going out at night, and keeping a close watch on the developments in New York which he followed through the papers. By these he learned that everything had worked out as he hoped, that the crime was unsuspected, and the public interest centered on the chase for Barker. All that now remained to complete his enterprise was to get Carol.

That his continued success must have given him an almost insane confidence is proved by the way he went about this last and most difficult step. Criminals all slip up somewhere. He had attended to the details of the murder with amazing skill and thoroughness. It was in his estimate of the character of Carol that he showed that blind spot in the brain they all have.

The only way to explain it is that he was so sure of his own powers, so confident that she was heart whole and would be unable to resist the temptation of his enormous wealth, that he took the final risk—sent for her in Barker's name. Her response to his first summons encouraged him. When she didn't come he had many reasons with which to buoy himself up—fears, illness, the impossibility of leaving her mother.

But it made him more cautious and he didn't venture again till the hue and cry for Barker had subsided and he had made a move to the last port of call on the



St. Lawrence. That he had expected to take her by storm, win her consent and leave her no time to deliberate was proved by the fact that "Henry Santley" had engaged accommodations for himself and "sister" on the *Megantic*, sailing from Quebec at ten the next morning.

What had he intended to say to her, how was he going to explain? If he had not mentioned it in his statement we never would have known, for Carol did not give him time to tell. The story was simple and in the face of her supposed ignorance of the murder, might have satisfied her.

He was going to admit his duplicity in the Copper Pool—his excuse being he had done it for her. In his last interview with Barker he saw that discovery was imminent, and decided to drop out of sight. When he passed through his own office he was on his way out of the building, descending unseen by the stairs, and going immediately to Canada. When he read in the papers of the suicide, identified as Hollings Harland, no one was more surprised than he was.

How the mistake had been made he readily guessed. Some months before he had discharged one of his clerks for intemperance. The man, unable to get another job and in the clutch of his vice, had gone to the dogs, applying frequently to Harland for help. The lawyer, moved to pity, had given this in the form of clothing and money. On the afternoon of January fifteenth he had visited the Harland offices, in a suit of Harland's clothes, begging for money and threatening suicide. He was sunk to the lowest depths of degradation, for, during a few moments when he was alone in the private office, he had evidently searched among his employer's papers and taken a watch and chain which was lying on the desk, to be sent to a jeweler's for repairs. Startled in his hunt among the papers he had had no time to replace them and had put them in his pocket. After the man had gone Harland noticed the missing documents and jewelry but in the stress of his own affairs paid no attention to the theft. The next day when he read of the suicide, he remembered the man's threat to kill himself and realized he had done it later that afternoon. That the body, crushed beyond recognition, had been identified through the clothes, papers and watch as himself, he regarded as a lucky chance. Without his intervention a thing had occurred which forever severed him from the life he wished to be done with.

Such was Harland's crime as explained in Harland's statement. How we talked it over! How we mused on the slight happening that had brought it to light—a child at a window! Strange and wonderful! The hotel noises, the traffic in the street, faded into the silence of the night as we sat there, pondering, speculating, and awed too by this modern fall of Lucifer.



# CHAPTER XXI

## MOLLY ENDS THE STORY

They all came back on Wednesday night, late, in the small hours. I had a wire from Babbitts—and Gosh, as I sat up waiting for him I thought I'd die right there on my own parlor carpet! For, of course, I supposed she'd tell them what I'd done and he was coming straight home to divorce me.

First off when he came in I was afraid to move, then, when I got a good look at his face, I saw he didn't know. He was so crazy with joy and triumph he didn't notice how I acted—trembly and excited about the things that didn't matter. How did she get there—what made her go—were the questions I was keen to have answered. Did it off her own bat—recognized the voice on the phone—instinct—knew all along something was wrong—and just rushed off without thinking of anything. She was a tip-topper—wonderful girl—seemed almost as if she was clairvoyant, didn't I think so? Yes, I did, but maybe when it was your father you felt that way, and I sank back against the cushions of the davenport, weak in the knees and swallowing down a lump in my throat as big as a new potato.

The next day I had a letter from her that made me sick—gratitude bubbling out of every line—and saying she'd told Jack and how never, as long as either of them lived, would they reveal it to a soul. That made me sicker—the two of them down on their bended knees! I've lied in my life, and though it's come back on me like a bad dream, I've been able to bear it. But having two people like that ready to worship you because you did something that you didn't do would take the spirit out of Theodore Roosevelt.

Then came the great excitement, the case going to the public, and Babbitts' getting his Big Story. It made a worse uproar than the suicide and disappearance,

the city was stunned and thrilled and everything else it could be, and not a man, woman or child but was reading the *Dispatch* and asking you if you'd ever heard of such an awful thing and enjoying every word of it. Babbitts' picture was in all the papers—and a *raise*, well, I guess so!

It would have been the proudest moment of my life, but who can be proud when they're full up with nothing but guilty conscience? Not me, anyway. Even when Babbitts came home Friday night with a set of black lynx furs, carrying them himself and putting them on me, I felt no joy. Can you understand it—having a secret from the one you love best, and not knowing if he knew that secret whether he wouldn't drop you out of his arms like a live coal and you'd see the love dying from his face? Oh, it was awful. I had to turn away from him to the mirror—getting up the right smile for a fur set when a rope of pearls wouldn't have lifted the misery off me.

Sunday Jack asked us to his place for dinner—just us two and Miss Whitehall. All the way downtown Babbitts was wondering why it was only Miss Whitehall—sort of funny he didn't include Mr. George, who was often there, and even the old man, seeing it was to be a dinner of the Harland case outfit. I had my own ideas on the subject, and they made me limp, sitting small and peaked beside Babbitts, with my hands damp and clammy in my new white gloves.

It was a swell dinner, the finest things to eat I ever had, even there. Miss Whitehall, all in black with her neck bare, and Jack in his dress suit, were such a grand pair I'd have enjoyed the mere sight of them, only for that terrible secret.

It wasn't till the end of dinner—old David gone off into the kitchen—that the thing I'd been waiting for came out. Jack's face told me it was coming—happiness and pride were shining from it like a light. He'd asked us there—his best and truest friends—to tell us before anyone else, that he and Miss Whitehall were going to be married.

They looked across the table at each other—a beautiful beaming look—and Babbitts with his mouth open looked at them, and I looked down at my plate where the ice cream was melting in a pink pool. Then Jack poured champagne into our glasses and raising them high we drank their healths, and then clinked the rims together and laughed, and wished them joy. It ought to have been perfectly lovely and it *would* have been if that fiendish guilty conscience of mine could only have gone to sleep for a few minutes.

And then came the awful and unexpected. I didn't think he'd dare to do it but he did. Turning to me with his glass in his hand, and his face so kind it made me melt like the ice cream, Jack said:

"And there's going to be another health drunk—Molly's. Molly Babbitts, the best friend that any man and woman ever had, the person who did the biggest thing in the whole Harland case."

He wasn't going to tell—he knew enough for that, he knew that Babbitts wasn't on, but he wanted *me* to understand. I looked at their faces, Jack's with its grateful message, and Carol's saying the same, and Babbitts' red with pride and joy. *Then* I couldn't bear it. Feeling queer and weak, I sat dumb, not touching my glass, looking at the plate.

"Why, Mollie," said Babbitts surprised, "aren't you going to answer?"

"No," I said suddenly, "not till I've told something first."

I guess I looked about as cheerful as the skeletons they used to have at feasts in foreign countries. Anyway I saw them all amazed, their eyes fixed staring on me. I stiffened up and set both hands hard on the edge of the table, and looked at Carol. My lips were so shaky I could hardly get out the words:

"You're all wrong—you've made a mistake. I didn't do it for you the way you think—I—I—" I turned to Jack and the tears began to spill out of my eyes, "I did it for *him*."

"*Me?*" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you. We swore to be friends once and that's what I am. I saw you were going to tell her. I thought it would ruin you and I knew I couldn't stop you—so—so—as *I* didn't matter—I did it myself before you could."

He pushed back his chair all stirred and pale. Carol, with a catch of her breath, said my name—just "Molly," nothing more. But Babbitts, who didn't know where he was at, cried out:

"Did *what?* For Heaven's sake what's it all about?"

Then I told him—the whole thing—out it came with tears and sobs—all to him, every word of it, with not a voice to interrupt, and when it was done, down went my head on the table with my hair in the ice cream.

Well, what do you think happened? Was he mad—did he say, "You're a false, deceitful woman. Begone?" Oh, he didn't—he *didn't!* He got up and came around the table and Carol and Jack slipped away somewhere and left us alone.

Afterward in the parlor, me a sight with my nose red and the ice cream only half out of my hair, we talked it all out and they—Oh well, they said a lot of things—I can't tell you what—too many and sort of affecting. It made me feel awful uncomfortable, not knowing what to say, but Babbitts *adored* it, couldn't get enough of it, just sat there nodding like the Chinese image on the mantelpiece, while those two fine people sat and threw bouquets at his wife.

On the way up the street, we didn't say much, walking close together hand tucked in arm. But suddenly, up under one of those big arc lights in Gramercy Park, he stopped short, and looking strange and solemn, gave me a kiss, a good loud smack, and said, sort of husky:

"I love you more this evening, Morningdew, than I ever did since the first day I met you."

Well—that's the end. Jack and Carol are going to be married this spring and go to Firehill. Babbitts and I have a standing invitation down there for every Sunday and all summer if we want. There's a great lawsuit started to prove the claims of Mrs. Whitehall and Carol as Johnston Barker's wife and child. He died without a will, so in the end they'll get most all he left—piles and piles of money. It's in the Whitney office and last time I saw Mr. Whitney he told me Carol would some day be one of the richest women in New York.

It won't spoil her—she's not that kind—a grand, fine woman, true blue every inch of her. I've come to know her well and I'm satisfied she's just the girl I would have chosen for Jack Reddy. Queer, isn't it, the way things come about? Here was I, searching for a wife for him, turning them all down, and he goes and stumbles on the only one in the country I'd think good enough. That's the way it is with life—when it looks most like a muddle it's going straightest. It sure is sort of confusing—but it's a good old world after all.

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